RESEARCH PAPER

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SPACE AND SEQUENCE: A TOPOGRAPHY OF *HERE*

Richard McGuire's *Here*, an "artist book disguised as a graphic novel", follows a single viewpoint over a multimillennial timespan. Pursuing potential storylines on several apparently incompatible levels (gestural, historical, evolutionary, cosmic), this ostensibly simple concept provides a broad template for exploring non-linear narrative capacities of printed media: it could be examined as a non-anthropocentric visualization of a chronotope (Bakhtin), an SF staging of *espacement* (Derrida), an exemplary ergodic text (Aarseth), an exercise in tactile multimodality or collage fiction (Gibbons). The common ground of these perspectives is the material framework of a *codex*: the corner of a room depicted in the majority of *Here*'s pages structurally limits the potentially endless diversity of content, while also metonymically playing upon its own iso-morphic relation to the book as a three-dimensional object. This disrupts the temporality of reading and storytelling in a variety of ways, and the article focuses on *Here*'s ambivalent position regarding the factors of sequence and simultaneity, narrative and spatiality.

Keywords: comics, graphic novel, speculative fiction, spatiality, book, reading

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THE TIME OF WRITING

At first glance, Richard McGuire's *Here* seems to exemplify what Marjorie Perloff calls a "differential text" (Perloff 2006: 146): an artwork capable of migrating across different media while retaining its recognizable identity. Initially, it was presented as a short black and white comic in *Raw* (Volume 2, No. 1, 1989), a magazine edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly. Starting in 2009, it was developed into a full-length book in colour, published in 2014, followed by an interactive e-book. Various materials generated or collected during this period

provided a basis for two exhibitions,[1] an unlikely theatre production followed in 2019 (*Déjà* by the Krumple company), and in early 2022 a film adaptation was announced. Therefore, *Here* might appear to be a process-oriented project in its essence, existing in various substrates with no definitive version. A book, for example, would not be the material closure of this process, nor even its optimal document: it could only be regarded as a temporary "host medium" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 121) of a perpetually evolving semiotic configuration, and the impression that it has the capacity to arrest or complete this flow thoroughly depends on our cultural or historical conditioning.

Nevertheless, the primary goal of this article is not an analysis of this transmediality, which might imply that there is an immutable semantic core preexisting and interlinking all of its formal variations. I will try to show the features of *Here* that are best discerned (or perhaps exclusively visible) in its printed and bound state, and examine the mechanics of certain devices as they play out within the format of a book. This is not an arbitrary choice: the major concerns of this project (relation of space to time, transience and memory) coincide with the fact that they are incorporated in a *codex*, setting up an inventive interplay of image and narration, stasis and movement, spatiality and sequence.

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The formal vocabulary of *Here* was already developed to a large extent in the 1989 original. Groensteen (1991) wrote a close and thorough analysis of this version, but its most concise description was probably provided by Chris Ware (2014):

> it simply pictured the corner of a room from a fixed viewpoint, projecting a parade of moments, holidays, people, animals, biology, geology [...] onto windows of space labelled by year (1971, 1957, 1999, 100,097 BC). Birthdays, deaths, dinosaurs. In 36 panels, the universe.

I will return to the issue of the fixed viewpoint, but it should be stressed immediately that *Here* provides us with a thoroughly demystified Aleph: rather than encapsulating everything that ever existed everywhere, aiming for a cosmic plenitude which would possibly be incompatible with its six pages in paperback

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[1] *From Here to Here: Richard McGuire Makes a Book* (Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 2014) focused on McGuire's work process, presenting sketchbooks and drawings, source photographs and other materials to highlight the transformations of the original version; *TimeSpace: After "Here" by Richard McGuire* (Museum Angewandte Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, 2016) took a very different approach, opting for a life-sized staging of chosen moments from the book and positioning the visitors as "protagonists" of the narrative.

format, it presents the "universe" of a single point in space, reaching out across the totality of its timespan.

Ware went on to describe this deceptively simple idea as a revolution on par with Joyce or Stravinsky: this was "a new way of making a comic strip", and the 2014 version will be "a new way of making a book" (2014). The original idea is retained in this edition, but a larger format and 300 pages in full colour allow for a broader range of devices to develop, initiating a more complex interaction of emerging storylines and visual compositions. The traditional comics grid, still present in the first version, is completely abandoned here:[2] the basic unit of composition is a page spread, typically dominated by an unframed image of a room, dated in the upper left corner. Many pages contain additional smaller dated images, "windows"[3] opening onto both past and future of this particular location, inserted in various places (the middle of the spread, a corner or an edge of the page, occasionally creating a collage effect), with no "intericonic space" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 121). These also comply with the established viewpoint: they are not close-ups of objects in the room, fragmented images of a different location, or stylized hypodiegetic content (someone's thoughts, memories, imagination, etc.): they are simply sections of what is visually available from the same position, but in a different point in time. There can be dozens of these inserts on a given page spread, and they vary greatly in terms of content, date, mutual relations and connection to the underlying image. Some of them form sequences resembling studies of movement, "choreographies", or stop-motion visualizations within a very narrow timeframe: a bird flying into the room, a construction worker carrying planks, etc.; others create similar sequences across several pages, achieving a further degree of independence from the underlying panel, allowing us to read them pseudo-cinematically (almost like a flipbook, enhancing the illusion of movement).

One of the key innovations is the use of the book format itself: the volume attempts to metonymically embody what it conventionally represents in two dimensions. The space repeatedly depicted in roughly three quarters of the book is carefully positioned so that the corner of the room coincides with the binding: the boards become walls and keep pursuing this non-metaphorical coincidence by presenting the façades of the house on the cover. A further self-referential split

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[2] Putting aside the issue of cultural unease, this might provide us with a formal explanation of the fact that McGuire's web site describes *Here* as "an artist book disguised as a graphic novel" ("Here").

[3] McGuire thought of this device when he first saw Microsoft Windows in operation (Bieber Lake 2019: 144); Ware also stresses the "then new computer-window metaphor of 'selecting' a portion of an image" as an important formal influence on the vocabulary of *Here* (McGuire 2006: 6).

takes place on each page spread, which can be read simultaneously as a tangible piece of coloured paper ("wallpaper") pasted onto the boards ("walls"), and as a two-dimensional illustration representing objects in a fictional wallpapered space. The heavy cultural and semantic charge of wallpaper produces additional meanings: it is an immediate temporal and historical signpost, clearly demarcating different decades, the passage of time, generations replacing one another; therefore, the scenes of putting up or tearing down wallpaper have a further metanarrative potential (see Moncion 2016: 205, 207). This brings us closer to the main concern of *Here*: an interplay of static images representing space, and narration implying causality and the passage of time.

As an exploration into "the narrative tense of comics" (Ware 2006: 6), *Here* revolves around two factors: the book as a spatial object, and the atypical breakdown of the narrative content. Both situate the elements of the narrative in a certain simultaneity which, however, remains bound to the notions of sequence and causality. McGuire's storytelling heavily exploits the features of its own material substrate, and I will describe the ontology and typology of the interplay between them.

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The most obstinate, extremely rigid narrative constraint of *Here* is provided by the format of the book: in the absence of a grid, the basic unframed panel – taking up every page spread and coinciding with its borders – appears repeatedly in identical size and represents the same spatial section from the same point of view. Technically, this book is a series of 150 "identical" scenes, only "secondarily" (and non-sequentially) broken down by a multitude of embedded images. However, the timespan in which this "same scene" is depicted is truly vast, and a linear fabular progression from one page spread to the next occurs only sporadically. Furthermore, as noted above, the inserts tend to be analepses or prolepses, dislodged from the temporal point of the underlying panel.

However, this opens up a new question: what is the true first diegetic level of this book? Does the "story" begin in the first double spread (dated 1957), or "before" it? Which "before" should we conform to – the intradiegetic "first moment", dated 3,000,500,000 BCE, or the paratextual *incipit*, the image on the title page, dated 2014 (the year of the book's publication)? Are we expected to bend the rules of classical narratology and devise a new type of orientation point, mobile or dispersed, adhering to every image as a provisional first level, its calibrating capacity disappearing with the turning of a leaf? In the absence of a "fundamental" storyline, the images in *Here* read as a multiplicity of mutually disconnected – but emphatically not "mutually exclusive" (North 2018: 171) – "present moments", rather than "futures" and "pasts": they enable polycentric

scenes to form in a continuum where causality and temporality give precedence to a thoroughly different juxtaposition of discrete elements.

It should be stressed, however, that this "perpetual present tense" (Joel Smith qtd. in North 2018: 171) is not unique to McGuire's book: the principal invention of *Here* is actually its ingenious narrative tapping into the simultaneity in which every book takes place. McCloud's claim that in comics "both *past* and *future* are *real* and *visible* and *all around us*" (McCloud 1994: 104) is undoubtedly correct, but it equally – if less obviously – refers to all inscriptions. Beyond the narratology of comics, this is an old theme of text-theory: writing as a spatial rather than temporal occurrence.

In his brief but very systematic essay "Literature and Space", Genette places literature alongside painting and architecture, posing a question: is there something like an "active spatiality of literature", moving beyond conventional representation of space (Genette 1979: 44)? The answer develops in four steps: the first invokes the virtual spatiality of *langue* in Saussure's structural linguistics, a synchrony underpinning the idea of a non-geometric spatiality in Blanchot's writings; the second examines writing as a material substrate existing in a certain simultaneity;[4] the third finds spatiality in rhetorical figures, enabling multiple layers of meaning to coexist within a single lexical body; finally, literature itself is easier to imagine as a vast "space", a Borgesian library "contemporary to itself", than as a timeline.

The second step will prove to be central for this reading of *Here*, even though Genette (in *Narrative Discourse*) remains cautious regarding the possibility of conflating narrativity with its material dependence on print:

> even if the sequentiality of its components can be undermined by a capricious, repetitive, or selective reading, that undermining nonetheless stops short of perfect analexia: one can run a film backwards, image by image, but one cannot read a text backwards [...] without its ceasing to be a text. Books are a little more constrained than people sometimes say they are by the celebrated *linearity* of the linguistic signifier, which is easier to deny in theory than eliminate in fact. (Genette 1983: 34)

Nevertheless, he concludes: "written narrative exists in space and as space"; it "has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading" (Genette 1983: 34).

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[4] Molotiu points out that Genette recognizes a particular type of spatiality (as elimination of diachrony) in comics or photo-novels (Molotiu 2011: 99) which "lend themselves to, and even invite, a kind of global and synchronic look – or at least a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images" (Genette 1983: 34).

In other words, temporal perception of any given text is necessarily misleading: its real profile will only be revealed from the vantage point of atemporality and simultaneity. It is no surprise that Mallarmé is invoked in "Literature and Space" (Genette 1979: 45), since for him the "*visual* resources of writing" are the prerequisite of the Book as a "total object", but even the full appreciation of Proust's exploration of temporality and memory in *À la recherche du temps perdu* depends on a "telescopic" reading: its episodes are separated by enormous temporal intervals (in diegetic time and in time of our reading) which, however, simply do not exist in the written *space* of the book. Only parting with "horizontality" of time and successive reading opens up a "vertical" or "transversal" perspective, admitting us into the "cathedral" of text (Genette 1979: 46).

In Derrida's work, inscription – as a material occurrence resisting comprehension and translation – becomes the starting point of a more radical re-evaluation of spatiality. The "ontological" profile of writing (actually subverting the hierarchies of classical ontology) non-diachronically connects all elements of text that our reading constructs as temporal, therefore "preceding" not only temporality, but subjectivity as well. The word Derrida introduces to describe this process is *espacement*, "spacing" understood as "becoming-space of time" (Derrida 1995: 68). The term itself, significantly, comes from Mallarmé's *Preface* to *Un coup de dés*: he states that "blanks" assume the prime importance in this work and that its sole innovation is an "*espacement de la lecture*" (Mallarmé 1996: 121). This claim is modest only superficially: *Un coup de dés*, of course, is a groundbreaking moment in the history of modern writing, placing typography in the very centre of poetic creation. Thus, rather than being merely "graphically fixed" in order to be documented, i.e. salvaged from its ephemeral acoustic or verbal being (itself originating in the author's consciousness or its various metaphysical stand-ins), a poem is a spatial object existing *only* as inscription, owing its existence to type, spacing, colour, font size, page format and visual composition, rather than to ideas, poetic images, emotions, etc. The elementary unit of a literary work is a *page*, and this newfound and fundamental *exteriority* of text has severe consequences for both author and reader: "Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject" (Derrida 1995: 69). A certain materiality, best manifested in this almost haptic understanding of inscription, remains absolutely foreign to subjectivity as an origin or *telos* of sense: "phenomenology of writing is impossible" (Derrida 1995: 68).

These conclusions change everything in the process of writing and reading, even when theory is concerned. A number of Derrida's own experiments in the mores of academic writing – "Tympan", *Glas*, "Parergon", "Envois" – owe at least

a part of their disposition to Mallarme's "spatialism" (Steinmetz 1994: 104). The wish to accentuate the materiality of writing is an enactment of a theoretical insight into the "non-sense of spacing" in every inscription (Derrida 1997: 257): a layer which remains unavailable to all facets of Hegelian *Aufhebung* (thought, reduction to a philosophical concept, recasting in a story, generalization or application to an endless series of comparable "examples"). Derrida will explore writing's capacity to endlessly digress, branch out and grow in complexity through tmesis, ellipsis or visual "inconsequentiality", far beyond any reader's capability to absorb it or intuitively follow its rhythm. Rather than being an error, described in Littré as an obstruction "cutting the connection between things" and keeping "the mind from seeing the sequence of correlatives" (Derrida 1986: 119), this is simply "writing's time [*temps d'écriture*]" (Derrida 1986: 147), graphically reminding us that a "present" of a certain text has little to do with linearity and causality of cognitive processes.[5]

Materiality of inscription thus becomes a safeguard against a certain crypto-theological idealism, eternally seeking to collapse the autonomy and structure of literature (or world itself) back into a (reader's or writer's) consciousness. Beyond all vagaries of theory, this take on *espacement* is probably one of the most enduring contributions of deconstruction to contemporary thought, particularly to a variety of new materialisms. It also brings us back to McGuire's book, even if the abolition of time in spatial configurations is not, as we have seen, a specific semiotic feature of comics, but of all books, remaining obscured by the linearity of syntax and narration. If a book is a three-dimensional object, a material occurrence in space, then all of its possible narratives – shaped according to various conventions of storytelling, representing temporality, and requiring time to unfold for any given reader – appear simultaneously in the volume which gives them material support.

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RHYMING EVENTS

Spatiality of every narrative bound in a book is, consequently, strategically exploited to become an ontological foundation of storytelling in *Here*. The

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[5] It is worth mentioning that Derrida's "Freud and the Scene of Writing" approaches the notion of "representability" (*Darstellbarkeit*) precisely as a "lithography before words: metaphonetic, nonlinguistic, alogical" (Derrida 2003: 259). The language of dreams – comparable to rebuses or hieroglyphs, visual configurations more akin to comics than phonetic writing – hinges on a "certain polycentrism"; it is "irreconcilable with the apparently linear unfolding of pure verbal representations" (Derrida 2003: 273), calling for a different stratification, if not elimination, of time as such.

volume is not paginated, and one might take this as an immediate hint to a specific distribution of narrative time: while this is a frequent feature of art monographs, relatively common in the world of graphic narratives as well, it is extremely rare in the traditional context of printed textual fiction. Initially, *Here* does not appear to require linear reading at all, as if this approach would miss the point, while a random read-through with skipping pages, reversing orders and alternating speeds would be a more appropriate and creative response to what it offers. Nevertheless, while linearity is constantly challenged in *Here*, this never resolves into a dissolution of narrativity, or even sequentiality.

However, two typical variants of this dissolution might appear as viable options for outlining the structure of this book. The previous paragraph actually describes "card shuffle" or "model-kit" books (Gibbons 2012b: 428), as Alison Gibbons calls them: works like Marc Saporta's *Composition No. 1* (1963), an unbound "permutation" novel challenging the reader to introduce a sequence into an apparently random and interchangeable sheaf of loose pages, or B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), significantly streamlining the same framework by fixing the first and final chapters, and offering the rest as bound pamphlets in a box, to be read in any order. Just like *Here*, these works court chaos and randomness only to a certain extent, but clearly point to an enforced disorganization of content as their conceptual limit.

The other variant of circumventing causality and linearity, while retaining the content and worldmaking capacities of a conventional narrative, is in many ways diametrically opposed to the first and far more widespread: recasting the material of a story as an archive, a database, a catalogue, an index, an encyclopaedia, a lexicon, etc. After Manovich, this seems to be the dominant option of organizing information outside of constraints of a story: a "spatial" (or logical, taxonomical, pseudo-bibliographical, etc.) configuration which facilitates a greater complexity and greater navigability in managing content. The most surprising feature of this variant is the ease with which readers can circumvent it to produce a traditional immersive experience: it often comes across simply as a "narrative to be reconstructed", and there is a rich and varied tradition of writing in this vein: Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (1978); Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* (1980);[6] Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984); Roberto Bolaño's *Nazi*

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[6] This is a tenuous example, but highly pertinent in terms of formal and material incompatibilities of film and printed media; arguably, the DVD version surpasses both the film and the book (1993), enabling the viewer to approach *The Falls* as a linear three-hour film or as a catalogue in two versions: an alphabetized list of ninety-two names, or an index of twenty-three themes.

Literature in the Americas (1996); finally, and more recently, Leanne Shapton's *Important Artifacts and Personal Property From the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* (2009)[7] and Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* (2014).

Here, however, ultimately opts out of these approaches, devising a spatial organization of content that eludes the plainly articulated (and often inherited rather than invented) structure of an archive. Actually, one of the most intriguing features of this book is a very fine oscillation between pursuing and abandoning narration and sequential organization. It is, after all, published as a bound volume, therefore at least suggesting the possibility of a completely traditional approach; furthermore, it does establish a multitude of narrative microsequences which thoroughly depend on linear reading. Nevertheless, this vacillation leaves the general composition open: there certainly is a breakdown of a story into discrete images, but the idea of closure, full overview, or a complete cognitive access to the whole, remains elusive.

Following Groensteen, we could describe the resulting structure as a network of images rather than a series of events, though not devoid of content or a "buried" narrativity: *braiding* (*tressage*), as he calls it, is always a storytelling manoeuvre. Therefore, this is "certainly an oriented network, since it is crossed by the instance of the story, but it also exists in a dechronologized mode, that of the collection, of the panoptical spread and of coexistence" (Groensteen 2007: 147). This quote, incidentally, does not specifically refer to *Here* at all, even though the early article on McGuire accentuates the capacity of braiding to sidestep traditional linear narration and bring temporally remote images "with no apparent diegetic coherence" together in a new spatial or topological order (Groensteen 1991: 100–101). According to Hannah Miodrag, the non-linear "webs of interrelationship that violate narrative sequence" (Miodrag 2013: 112) are the inherent trait of comics as such, their "*spatial* nature" and "*simultaneity* of [...] multiple panels on a two-dimensional page" distinguishing them from all other types of storytelling (Miodrag 2013: 114). Various theoretical approaches to comics concur on this point: every image simultaneously works both as a stage in a causal process and a discrete component of a cluster: as "a 'moment' in an imagined sequence of events, and as a graphic element in an atemporal design" (Charles Hatfield qtd. in Baetens and Frey 2015: 128).

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[7] Shapton is the first name in the Acknowledgements section in *Here*; her watercolour series *A9 Paintings* was exhibited alongside McGuire's *TimeSpace* in Frankfurt.

This entails a new examination of reading procedures as well.[8] Apart from abandoning or drastically redefining linearity, the physiology of reading images makes us unable to view a single frame in isolation from everything else, forcing us to see the background as well as the image in focus. "Nonsequential reading is inevitable, given the impossibility for the human eye to separate the panel from the page" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 106): this creates "a certain kind of alternation of action and stasis" in reading (Baetens and Frey 2015: 106), and scholars working on graphic novels will search for a "wider dialectics of sequence and surface" (Baetens and Frey 2015: 129) to describe this process. Consequently, reading will demand a different type of orientation in terms of the architecture of the page (hierarchy of elements, horizontal and vertical, left and right), and unceasingly oscillate between linear reconstruction of a narrative thread and a "translinear" inspection into a certain simultaneity (Groensteen 2007: 22), a "tabular organization" (Fresnault-Deruelle 1976: 7) resetting temporality into space and presenting a group of images rather than a clear reading path.

This is particularly visible in *Here*: the organization of page spreads described in the first chapter clearly discourages us from reading the page in any "order", including the priority of "background" over "inserts". Furthermore, bearing in mind that each page spread is established as a single image (rather than a sequenced grid), that there is often no recognizable order of reading the interpolated images, and that the page is used *in extenso* (which further temporally disorients our reading [see McCloud 1994: 95]), the end result is always in a curious equilibrium between stasis and an inkling of action or narrative development, complicating the logic of the reader's progression even further.

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In this context, it is worth digressing into Nicolas Abraham's studies on rhythm, where a great deal of care is taken to distinguish the objective and measurable mechanics of alternating qualities in observed data from rhythm as a strictly intentional phenomenon, i.e. a perceived pattern, a category of our insight rather than a genuine periodicity of a certain sequence. "In this sense, it is completely erroneous to speak of a perception of rhythm or of a 'perceived rhythm.' What occurs, in fact, is the rhythmization of perception" (Abraham 1995:

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[8] Laura Moncion describes *Here* as "a graphic narrative that does not so much tell a story as it invites the reader to confront their own processes of reading", forcing them to "examine their own narrativizing impulses in a bid to synthesize and comprehend a multivalent text" (Moncion 2016: 200). Conflicting temporalities of this book – or maybe of the graphic novel in general – require theoretical support from "*transmedial* narratology" (Moncion 2016: 201) which would be able to account for semiotic interactions and interferences between different media employed in its composition.

73); therefore, waves, heartbeats or ticking clocks in themselves "*are not* rhythms, but [...] they can become rhythms, at any moment and without the slightest modification" (1995: 67). Rhythms turn out to be ambivalent structures that both exist and do not exist in the observed material; Abraham even warns against "the error of seeking the origin of rhythm within the object" (Abraham 1995: 67). To the extent that a rhythm *does* appear, it does so thanks to the recipient's cognitive activity; "rhythm itself is unreal" (Abraham 1995: 74), it "happens because we have willed it" (Abraham 1995: 73), although never descending to the level of an apophenic illusion. "In short, in relation to its substratum, rhythm is both immanent and transcendent" (Abraham 1995: 22).

Therefore, what we observe as rhythm in a perceived object is nothing but an index of our cognitive processes taking account of something non-temporal, enforcing diachrony on material that is not linearly distributed at all. Reading comics – or perhaps reading as such – is *always* a reversed *espacement*: a becoming-time of space, transformation of a spatial object into a sequence demanded by the temporal parameters of our cognition. If comics are "converting time into space" (Groensteen 2013: 133), providing us with a "'temporal map' that represents time through spatial arrangements" (Singer 2011: 57), reading is the factor that introduces an external rhythm into this space, converting it back into time of perception.

The narrative dynamics of *Here* rely both on a recognition of this spatiality and an extremely subtle exploration of the inevitable sequentiality arising from our perception. They never stray into the territories completely devoid of narration, "abstract comics" which, as Molotiu claims, unfold in a "sequential dynamism" (Molotiu 2012: 89) accentuating frame-to-frame rhythm instead of (or without) a story. For all its sabotage of linear storytelling, *Here* never freezes in an "iconostasis",[9] nor does it call for Kristeva's *khora* to be explained.[10] Its nuanced composition, by contrast, is best illustrated by the fact that one of

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[9] Molotiu uses this term to describe polycentric, highly articulated visual compositions, sets of images presented in synchrony rather than suggesting (linear) narrative development (Molotiu 2012: 91).

[10] Molotiu explicitly traces the origins of his "sequential dynamism" to Kristeva's notion of the semiotic, which "corresponds to the formal/abstract dimension of comics [...] while her notion of the 'symbolic' is closer to the comics' narrative content" (Molotiu 2012: 99). *Khora*, taken from Plato's *Timaeus* and heavily informed by the topography of the Unconscious, is alternately described as a "rhythmic space" and formless matter before the thetic phase of establishing discrete objects: it "precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality", "precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (Kristeva 1984: 26).

its key devices thoroughly relies on narrative mechanics of linear sequencing, if only to subvert it. The language of comics represents the passage of time (and an implied causality) juxtaposing static images, and the fundamental formal tool for achieving this is the intericonic space – the "emptiness" between panels, which can, of course, be reduced to an invisible line, the mere fact of perceiving one panel replacing the other. However, the duration of this interval is not obvious nor standardized – its temporal value is contextual, and it can equally represent a millisecond and a millennium. McGuire exploits this indeterminacy to its utmost limits, not only in the way of shocking or amusing cuts from one era to another, but also in a more creative and poignant way: suggesting pseudo-causal "rhymes" between unconnected events.

This plays out as a highly original parody of sequentiality and remains the most prominent narrative strategy of *Here* after the initial impression of complete non-linearity. Images suggest causality or sequence (by their content or their placement on the page, the spatial arrangement of interpolations mimicking traditional frame-to-frame narration), but the very possibility of a true causal relation is immediately undermined by dating, setting the sequenced images at unrelated points on the location's timeline. In other words, what we fleetingly perceive as a continuous action with a discernible cause and consequence, turns out to be a montage of disconnected and unrelated images from various dates. This produces an uncanny effect: time is at once mobilized and frozen by a spatial arrangement of images which simultaneously read as discrete units and stages in a continuous, almost organic process. If these types of sequences traditionally imply a progression (either from moment to moment or from action to action), McGuire's approach introduces a third option which simulates the previous two while exposing them as mechanical and contrived. Surprisingly, in spite of this second "ontological remove" and its accentuated artificiality, this happens without undercutting their impact, their capacity to narrate, conduct immersion, move the reader. The new device deautomatizes the old ones, allowing them to keep on working conditionally. McGuire arranges these pseudo-causal parallelisms or false "coincidences" very carefully, intentionally disrupting the traditional hierarchy of elements and setting them in a "productive" relationship (Peeters 2007), as Peeters calls it: a spatial arrangement of these materials "dictates" (or produces the illusion of) narration, linearity, causality.

This is, therefore, the balance *Here* achieves: privileging space over sequence, without sacrificing the capacity to narrate. The cause-and-effect matrix which seems fundamental to narration is completely deactivated on the first diegetic level, effectively destroying the timeline of the story, only to be reinstated as a

"higher" transtemporal principle, cutting across time, using the full resources of the represented world as a repertoire for a new, "pseudo-causal" fabulation. While this type of a "randomizing" device might lead to an overwhelming impression of absurdity or chaos, the visual parallelisms described above effectively take the place of causality, assuming and retaining nearly all of its functions and narrative purposes. Something that happens in 2121 might have a "consequence" in 1623, but this is nonsensical only on the level of the imaginary "first diegetic level"; in *Here*, this is disarticulated into an archive of "eternal moments", free to engage in a tentative succession.

I will argue that this device – which employs, abandons and upgrades many features of the graphic medium in one move – goes beyond the formal issues of *Here*: a termination of each moment's "locked down" position in a linear timeline, setting it into transtemporal motion and interrelating it with everything else, has clear and far-reaching consequences for the portrayal of life, humanity, nature, reality, and finally for the capacities of the book as a narrative medium.

CHRONOTOPES AND HAECCEITIES   **161**

It is impossible to write about the narrative mechanics of *Here* without attempting to explain the role of content in the proceedings: the specific place unceasingly depicted on all of the book's page spreads. I'll try to connect several threads I have opened by following a sequence of ideas from Bakhtin's classical treatise on the chronotope, a "formally constitutive category of literature" designating the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 1981: 84). As explained above, this "fusing" of spatial and temporal indicators has a particular importance for the narrative capacities of comics, and perhaps it is no coincidence that McGuire's Frankfurt exhibition of *Here* was titled *TimeSpace*.

What is striking in Bakhtin's description of the chronotope is the insistence on the spatial component of this dyad as a wellspring of narration. There is a clear emphasis on *visibility*, on an almost iconic representation as chronotope's crucial generative and "binding" power: it provides a "ground" for narration of events, practically a pre-condition of representability as such, the infrastructure of all mimetic effects. The chronotope is "the primary means for materializing time in space" (Bakhtin 1981: 250): time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (Bakhtin 1981: 84) and "palpable" through it (Bakhtin 1981: 250). A near-religious tone pervades the descriptions of chronotope "giving body" and "blood" to events, i.e. the storyline itself, making possible creating of "scenes"

which would otherwise remain reduced to mere data, "dry information and communicated facts" (Bakhtin 1981: 250). It is plainly stressed that this is not an "illustration" of content which is perfectly attainable and narratable by other means, but a source of sensible data enabling semiotic structures to emerge: the raw, unsequenced matter of storytelling. Bakhtin pinpoints the visibility and audibility of material signs as a prerequisite of abstract thought in general: "every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981: 258).

The case of *Here* would certainly benefit from a theory privileging the creation of "scenes" and palpably constructed spaces as the *a priori* of storytelling, prompting a specifically understood *reality* to surface through the non-narrative aspects of texts. However, Bakhtin reaches a different conclusion; instead of tying spatiality to creative power of writing and materiality in general, he returns to a traditional site of authority over narrative: "we always arrive, in the final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being" (Bakhtin 1981: 252–253), even if this is a retraction from a far more ambivalent qualification given in the introduction: "The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well" (Bakhtin 1981: 84).

These tendencies conflict in *Here* as well. There is a widespread trend to read it as a family history, even as a veiled autobiography (see the next chapter), but favouring this angle forces us to ignore a significant amount of material in the book, not only in terms of quantity but of conceptual import. From a vantage point of the "cosmic" narrative timespan covered, foregrounding the residence of a certain family at a certain address – or even structuring that space as an "address" to be inhabited – seems like a bizarre anthropomorphic distortion of reality.

Namely, there is a different "realism" at work here. The true narrative scale of *Here* includes occurrences one could, after Meillassoux, describe as "ancestral" (Meillassoux 2008: 10), predating not only the house or humankind, but even the formation of territory where the events will take place; geographical changes, ranging from the emergence of woodland, via centuries of human habitation, to heavy flooding turning this into an underwater terrain; an extreme range of flora and fauna, prehistoric, current and fictional (reaching far into the future);[11] different

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[11] Konstantinou partly organizes his analysis of *Here* around the image of an unknown animal dated 10,175, affording us a "relationship of recognition with the vastness of the non-human world", the "background upon which life unfolds, the inanimate world upon which life finally depends" (Konstantinou 2015).

human cultures, including Lenape in the 17th century, contemporary United States, and a vague, post-nuclear 23rd century; a flux of objects within the house: furniture, decorations, rugs, paintings, gadgets, clothes, etc.; "stories", generally small and "anecdotal", rather than connected to a great History of Events (for example, someone telling a joke in 1989, a tree growing between 1564 and 1775, a few milliseconds in an arrow's flight in 1402, etc.); finally, non-narrative gestures and movements – human, animal and otherwise – rhyming over time, sometimes amounting to figures sleeping or the smallest variations of light in empty rooms.

After this, it seems strange to remember Bakhtin trying to distance himself from Kantian vision of space and time as transcendental forms, tying them instead to "the most immediate reality" (Bakhtin 1981: 85), only to fall back on the human figure as the ultimate orientation point. If we are to persist in thinking within the framework of a chronotope while reading *Here*, it demands a thorough non-anthropocentric reorientation. This book establishes a continuum in which soil, fluids and gas, grass and trees, reptiles and birds, humans and machines, virtual realities, light and sound not only coexist, but intertwine ontologically, not by the grace of a story, but in a non-metaphoric entanglement, as fleeting forms arising from the material fluctuations of a specific locale.

This shift in perspective does not result in chaos: a certain location – "ordinary", unique and irreplaceable like any other – along with a myriad of ephemeral circumstances that define its profile in a given moment, possesses a distinct "character", arising from all of its minute components; however, the multiplicity underpinning this "character" seems diametrically opposed to received ideas of a stable and recognizable identity. There is, of course, a theory ideally placed to describe this network of dispersed agencies, both natural and "artificial", in their "subjectless individuation": Deleuze's and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* works precisely on describing material, impersonal singularities as multiplicities equally opposed to the individual (the structures of identity) and the universal (concepts and idealities). "There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 287). Haecceities are spatial, but material (or topological) rather than geometrical, irreducible to principles and forms, tied to a specific sheaf of processes intertwining their components ("assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, people, powers, and fragments of all of these" [Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 179]): multiplicities forming the microlevel of any chronotope's "here and now".

As mentioned above, one should avoid thinking of this pointillistic material context as a space to be filled with events or characters; haecceity does not consist

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"of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 289). Even more radically, it is misleading to think as if "there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type"; on the contrary, a haecceity is "what you are, and [...] you are nothing but that" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 289).[12] Turning back to the question of disrupted temporality ensuing from this rearrangement of narrative hierarchies, we inevitably come to the notion of a rhizome, a spatial organization connecting haecceities to literature itself: "All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity – but we don't know yet what the multiple entails" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 4).

This, of course, bears directly on *Here* and its specific composition, in itself at least crypto-rhizomatic: it is a decentred system in which everything is (or theoretically could become) connected to everything else laterally, rather than being linked according to an arborescent narrative hierarchy or teleology. This is literally a book of variable speeds and multiple layers: the identical basic frame, repeated a hundred and fifty times, clashes with an extreme spectrum of information density, not only in terms of elements displayed within the frame, but in terms of number and content of interpolated inserts, demanding different types of pacing from one page spread to the next. The placement of these materials in every composition makes multiple sections of this timeline intersect, rhyme or collide, persistently guiding us back to the narrative primacy of space, as if it

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[12] This seems like an appropriate place to acknowledge that a deeper analysis of *Here* could have accentuated the non-anthropocentric factor even further: the motifs of climate change, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, post-speciesist history (before and beyond the Anthropocene), non-human agency of flora, fauna and inorganic matter, etc., would certainly benefit from a systematic reading in a posthuman key; furthermore, it would have to be built on theoretical work stemming precisely from Deleuze. A thorough exploration of this theme is certainly outside the scope of this article, but a quick and somewhat arbitrary conceptual outline could be sketched out as a provisional bibliography. One approach could benefit from a number of works tentatively associated with "speculative realism": Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2006), Graham Harman's *Guerrilla Metaphysics* (2005) or *Object-Oriented Ontology* (2019), Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* (2007), Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (2013), or Reza Negarestani's perpetually forthcoming *Abducting the Outside*. Perhaps closer to the tenor of *Here* and a more "vitalist" strain of new materialisms, a different perspective would open through Rosi Braidotti's *Metamorphoses* (2002) or *The Posthuman* (2013), Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), or recent works by Donna Haraway, such as *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). *Posthuman Glossary* (2018), edited by Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, could also serve as a useful orientation point.

were a material archive in itself, a resource or substratum of all possible events or stories, containing them in advance.

Faced with an absence of linear storytelling, we enter the general problematics of visual arts: how much time does an "uneventful" panel demand (for instance, a near-abstract, static and meditative prehistoric "landscape" with no inserts)?[13] What is the optimal speed of traversal for a given page? Does it depend on "striation" by windows, and their inner quality? Should we really peruse the stop-motion sequences as flipbooks, ideally reading them twenty-four pages a second? Is anything lost as we reorient a static image to transform it into a link in a narrative chain?[14] Finally, where to begin? What is the first point of reading on a page that respects the top-down organization of our visual perception, but offers no points of orientation otherwise? Again, no predetermined strategies are offered, and this is what makes *Here* an ergodic experiment, bringing us back to the issue of the viewpoint.

SUPERIMPOSITIONS

As noted previously, one of the key devices counteracting the extremely heterogeneous content of *Here* is the fixed frame. In spite of frequent critical emphasis on the room or the house, it immediately becomes clear that what is fixed is the point of view, not an observed object: it brings all of the book's elements together, usurping the role traditionally held by stories or characters. However, the inevitable question arises: who is watching? Is this perspective something that can be assigned to a certain entity, is it a cognitive necessity, a purely optical parameter, or a stylistic convenience?

There is an overwhelming bias attempting to place *Here* in the domain of the personal and the individual. Chris Ware's reading is exemplary in that respect: it pinpoints all of the formal inventions of the book only to reposition them as aspects of an anthropic consciousness and its quest for meaning: *Here* is "the first successful attempt to visually recreate the matrix of memory and human understanding of time"

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[13] If words are indicators of duration (McCloud 1994: 95) and borderless panels or "bleeds" that stretch to the edge of the page additionally confuse our temporal orientation (McCloud 1994: 102–103), then the "landscapes" in *Here* are doubly "timeless", perhaps its farthest point from the traditional vocabulary of comics.

[14] Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, it is tempting to answer affirmatively; a loss seems inevitable during information transport from one continuum to another: from *Aeon* as a peculiar temporality of haecceities, to *Chronos*, measurable and quantifiable time of subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 289).

(Ware 2014), so the juxtapositions described above transpire to be a "liberation" of temporality from the confines of the page; space is fragmented and tenses are mixed up in order to eventually be placed "squarely back into the consciousness, and, more importantly, the control, of the reader" (Ware 2006: 6). This conclusion might be unexpected, but there is nothing accidental about it: Ware repeatedly foregrounds the reader as the supreme element in the topography of this book. The reader's roles, however, vary from a participant in the narrated world[15] to its main character (deposing the house as the focal point), only to finally ascend from the strip to "a vantage point where one may see all times and all places all at once, creating an experience that is, ultimately, transcendent" (Ware 2006: 6).

This grants us a very comfortable analytical position, but suppresses the sheer diversity of materials, textures, lifeforms and technologies involved in the haecceity of *Here*. The main devices of the book work against the linearity of time (and causality as its counterpart), and it seems unfitting to praise them as processes preparing the content for its ultimate "concretization" in a reader's consciousness. *Here* undoubtedly offers an inventive resection of space and temporality, but it is utterly dependent on the material predisposition of the printed volume, rather than the capacities of a possible reader (which, from this perspective, seem to annul rather than enhance its work). Perhaps one could attempt to salvage this apotheosis of the reader by returning to *A Thousand Plateaus*: it describes brain as a multiplicity, "more grass than a tree", a "horizontal" place of discontinuities, pseudo-causalities and unexpected juxtapositions (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 17), therefore something that mirrors the processes of *Here* instead of translating them into arborescence and transcendence.[16] Nevertheless, the question remains: if the format of *Here* is based on transtemporality, on material rather than symbolic links, is it even compatible with a subjectivity as its ultimate origin?

It is my impression that *Here* provides us with something else, but I would like to examine this approach attuned to the readers and their responses a little further.

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[15] The fact that the corner of the room coincides with the binding of the book "places the reader into the space of the story" (Ware 2014). A further element adds to this interpretation: all images underlying paratexts (title page, copyright, dedication, acknowledgements) are dated 2014 (the actual publication date), providing us with an interesting self-referential moment, establishing an axis between the book, its (contemporary) readers, and the intratextual timeline of the house.

[16] Balestrino's analysis of *Here* (2018), for example, presents various approaches to spacetime in physics in order to turn precisely to *A Thousand Plateaus* and its sections concerned with memory as deterritorialization and reterritorialization of space and time (Balestrino 2018: 72–74); this is followed by a close reading of several spreads where "pseudo-causal" juxtapositions are examined as a device lifting the reader from linear temporality into a "multilayered, synchronic" viewpoint (Balestrino 2018: 75–76).

Contrary to the issues I have raised, many readers tend to stress the intense emotional effect that this book can have, and this might come as a surprise, bearing in mind the absence of characters or storylines as traditional affective catalysts (Guilbert 2015). I will offer three explanations of this book's demonstrable immersive power.

The first one is brief and intuitive: it concerns the autobiographical angle. The house is based on McGuire's old family home in Perth Amboy, New Jersey; the scenes are partially recreated from old family photographs;[17] the story begins in 1957, the year of McGuire's birth;[18] finally, the dedication reads: "To My Family". This perspective is strengthened by situating the viewpoint across William Franklin's Proprietary House: this provides a shared background of experience with the fictional inhabitants, making the book more readily available to immersion (a highly efficient mechanism of historical fiction in general: taming the microhistorical alterity by including widely known people, places, or events in the narrative). All of this supports Ware's interpretation: comics embody human memory in a new way, and our emotional response to their narratives depends on the scope of possible analogical apperception (if we can stretch this notion to fictional entities).[19] The cognitive structure of "having been there" coupled with the topos of "someone's family home" functions as a sufficiently stable semantic framework for us to transpose into emotionally, and the obvious shortcoming of placing a personal history in an impossibly vast multimillennial frame, necessarily making it ephemeral and trite, is resolved by anthropocentric bias (the family story is "more important" than the accretion of the Earth, animal species emerging and dying out, technologies evolving, etc.).[20]

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[17] North claims that this is an important structural element of *Here*, since many images were snapshots transposed into drawings or watercolours (North 2018: 172).

[18] Groensteen detected this as an important point – albeit as a hypothesis, relating to a character called "William" as McGuire's possible stand-in – even in the 1989 version of *Here* (Groensteen 1991: 98).

[19] It would be advisable to read through the better part of Husserl's Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*: "my entire primordial ownness, proper to me as a monad, has the content of the Here"; however, by way of appresentation, my own ego "given in constant self-perception" reaches the possibility of intersubjectivity with an Alter Ego, absconded in the Other's body. "Therefore an ego is appresented, as other than mine", "'such as I should be if I were there'" (Husserl 1982: 119). One should note the importance of embodiment and corporeal "similarity" for a successful apperception of alternate existence; this would account for a reader being placed "in" the represented room by the book metonymically posing as a house, with the binding as its corner. "It is the same Nature, but in the mode of appearance: 'as if I were standing over there, where the Other's body is'" (Husserl 1982: 123).

[20] Chaney remarks on this "decidedly human preference" (Chaney 2016: 178) in *Here*: he describes the book as an "Autography of Place" which explores "the non-human consciousness of

The second explanation is also crypto-phenomenological and has to do with the non-human protagonist of the book: the house. There is a line to be followed through Bachelard[21] and Heidegger,[22] suggesting that a house is a decisive element in the formation of the human self, a cognitive tool for overcoming raw spatiality, otherwise eternally threatening to collapse back into non-anthropocentric formlessness. A house reads as a correlative of a "life", coinciding with the "topography of our intimate being" (Bachelard 1994: xxxvi), structuring us while we're using it to structure space: it is "the arbitrary geometry imposed by a human mind on a space for reasons of shelter and as a background to this theatre of life" (Ware 2014). Nevertheless, the authors who assume this angle (some of them in explicitly phenomenological or even theological tones [see Bieber Lake 2019: 149, 151–152]) have to account for the primal chaos of ancestral scenes: if these are not included simply to provide a contrast to the comfortable domesticity of the 20th-century house, they should be regarded as "equal", if not "more real" than houses, provisional and transient cultural constructions impressed upon space.

The third explanation comes from multimodality studies; it is therefore related to the previous two, but with different theoretical accents.[23] Our capacity to generalize our reading of particular signs (stemming, of course, from the signs themselves, whose efficacy depends precisely on not being restricted to any given particularity or referent) enables us to appreciate a singular experience as "potentially anyone's". Gibbons proposes "doubly deictic subjectivity [...] as a

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locality" and offers "a departure from the tyranny of the human altogether" (Chaney 2016: 177), but its underlying autobiographical aspect provokes a harsh verdict: "what seems to be the autobiography of a place turns out to be a mask for autographic business as usual" (Chaney 2016: 178).

[21] In *The Poetics of Space*, house is "a veritable principle of psychological integration" (Bachelard 1994: xxxvi): "Without it, man would be a dispersed being" (Bachelard 1994: 7).

[22] Writings like "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "Building Dwelling Thinking" offer an openly anthropocentric exploration of spatiality. Human habitation actually constitutes spatiality as such: "The location is not already there before the bridge is. [...] Thus the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge" (Heidegger 1975: 154).

[23] Gibbons defines multimodality as "the coexistence of more than one semiotic mode within a given context" (Gibbons 2012a: 8), leading to the notion of "multimodal literature" (Gibbons 2012b: 420) as a corpus relying on this semiotic plurality in its concept, composition, narration, etc. This opening towards the material vocabularies of other media (print included) does not amount only to visible reconfigurations of content: it involves a different sensibility to materials and textures of other media as such – their lacunae, blank spaces, silences, etc. "The narrative implication of this rematerialisation is a potentially new awareness of how narrative and sensory orders are intertwined in graphic narrative thanks to its capacity for combining alternative orders, paces, scales and simulated sensations" (Orbán 2018: 239).

term for the way in which subjective resonances can occur between readers in the discourse-world and characters within the text-world", and this subjectivity relies upon the "superimposition of fictional character and actual reader" (Gibbons 2012a: 210),[24] as well as a certain "semipermeability between discourse-world and text-world" (Gibbons 2012a: 212).

It is particularly interesting that multimodality studies emphasize the corporeality of reading, approaching literature as a largely physical experience: "any account of emotional responses to literature, and especially to multimodal literature, must take the embodied nature of cognition into account" (Gibbons 2012a: 224). If multimodal literature requires a "conceptual shift" "from reading to transmodal construction of narrative meaning" (Gibbons 2012b: 421) – or from "reader to 'user'" (Hallet 2009: 150) – we might approach *Here* as an example of a strictly limited ergodic exercise:[25] in order for a superimposition to occur (or for the transcendent vantage point to be acquired), an extranoematic manoeuvre will have to be performed. The decisive deictic shift will be initiated by "the reader's bodily actions in the discourse-world" which are "utilized for narrative effect" (Gibbons 2012a: 213). Admittedly, *Here* does this in a very understated manner – the ergodic act will be no more than leafing through the book in a non-linear way – and does not deviate from the "standard" format of a *codex* the way some other "tactile fictions" do.[26] Nevertheless, the very fact of its disrupted sequentiality demands a tactile response, an active and corporeal process of a literal back and forth: we are compelled to repeatedly pass through the "same" places in order to appreciate everything that is occurring on a single page spread, but also to take into account narrative and

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[24] As expected, "images that corresponded to character viewpoint, thus impelling readers to project into the deictic centre of a character, and deictic factors such as usage of the present tense were found to be mechanisms of immersion" (Gibbons 2012a: 209); returning to previous chapters, we find again that "atemporality" or "present tense" of the images is a pivotal element, while the viewpoint of a character is completely absent: in *Here*, it is an empty frame, a placeholder.

[25] Some of these ideas can be traced back (or at least considered in parallel) to Aarseth's *Cybertext* and the famous definition of ergodic literature, where a "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (Aarseth 1997: 1). This potentially misleading formulation ("nontrivial effort") actually refers to an "extranoematic" performance demanded from the reader (or, significantly, "user"): "this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of 'reading' do not account for" (Aarseth 1997: 1).

[26] I have already mentioned the "card shuffle" or "model-kit" novels; Gibbons suggests two more subcategories (Gibbons 2012b: 428): epistolary multimodal novels (an interesting example – crossing into the "ontological hoax" category – would be *S.* (2013) by Doug Dorst and J. J. Abrams) and "cut outs", like Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), or B. S. Johnson's *Albert Angelo* (1964); in the latter, holes in the pages were introduced to "see the future" – an interesting prefiguration of transtemporal "windows" in *Here*.

formal threads occurring on multiple pages (not always successive ones). This is less ostentatious than some other devices of tactile fiction, but nevertheless a step in the same direction: reading as intellectual cognition of translatable content is recast as an interaction of the body of a reader with the body of a book.[27]

These processes become more complicated if we examine them together with a specifically structured repetitiveness of content in *Here*.[28] Dates are extremely important as an infrastructure of the book, and McGuire expertly uses their cyclical nature both as a narrative device and an immersive "enhancer". Snapshots of a family on the same couch in the same position from 1959 to 1983, Christmas trees positioned in the same place over the years and decades, a game of *Twister* played on the same spot in 1966, 1971 or 2015 ("the future"), furniture and Vermeer reproductions in the same places, the reoccurring "key, watch, wallet" routine – these rituals and objects are markers of time and its passing, carrying an easily recognizable emotional impact. They are obviously chosen on account of their sentimental and deictic potential, as well as their periodic character.

However, there is an uneasy interplay of the different and the same in anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, etc.: the passing of time and material fluxes of the real world provide every one of these "timeposts" with new and different elements each time around, nonetheless structuring them as something happening "once again". As Derrida writes, "one and the 'same' date commemorates heterogeneous events, suddenly neighbors to one another, even though one knows that they remain, and must remain, strangers, infinitely" (Derrida 2005: 10). Repetition, therefore, certainly never brings anything back as "the same" – a different material disposition (timespace placement) of what is symbolically "the same" actually transforms it into something else, assuming the façade of the same. (The purely identical "same" could occur only in a perspective of synchrony, but then as a true and absolute redundancy or a purely virtual duplication.)

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[27] Ian Hague's *Comics and the Senses* makes an impressive effort to move beyond the notion of comics as an exclusively visual medium, offering a comprehensive study of their "multisensory" aspects, including their tactile properties (Hague 2014: 92–122). Konstantinou also insists on the haptic dimension of comics – "It is only slightly an exaggeration to say that comics is an art of touching" (Konstantinou 2015) – connecting it to a broader analysis of the role of digitality in creating images, including the contemporary and future technologies in *Here*.

[28] Groensteen writes about the "seriality effect" achieved by devices like "static shots" and regularities in layout, perspective and content: "By repeating the same framing over and over again, the artist emphasizes a key moment within the narrative and prolongs it not in the mode of 'and then' but rather of 'and still... and still...'" (Groensteen 2013: 144). However, rather than an overwhelming *ostinato* (Groensteen 2013: 139), the rhythm of *Here* – perhaps due to constant timeslips – seems to be one of persistent *rubato*.

The notion of "rhyming events" resurfaces here, but with new overtones of "spectral revenance" (Derrida 2005: 18). Rhyme repeats the identical, allowing it to become something else simply on account of its occurrence elsewhere, retroactively changing and repositioning the "first" occurrence as well (turning it into a pre-echo of its own forthcoming counterpart). Repetition, in other words, disrupts the idea of a certain "here and now" as a self-contained monad: chronology and sequence become doubtful, making it impossible to clearly differentiate a presence from a premonition or a memory.

Effectively, repetition turns presence into something disembodied and ghostly, not only by "bringing back" something extinct, but by invoking something yet to come. "Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the specter of the past and the specter of the future [...] one must perhaps ask oneself whether the *spectrality effect* does not consist in undoing this opposition" (Derrida 2006: 48). If we connect this to the topos of "someone's family home" and the cognitive structure of "having been there", a way clearly opens toward a reading of *Here* as an exceptionally sophisticated haunted house narrative. The house is a place of transtemporal occurrences, non-causal parallelisms and repetitions, and this elimination of standard time (or of a stable first diegetic level) simultaneously affords us the "transcendental" point of view and "spectralizes" everything we observe, because any given image seems interpolated into an alien section of the timeline. North traces this impression to a proliferation of recording technologies which have "surrounded us with images and sounds from other times. The structure of *Here* implies that this has turned the present into a vast screen onto which the past and the future are projected, not in sequences, by and large, but rather in bursts and fits of reverie" (North 2018: 176), and this aligns perfectly with Derrida's notion of contemporary media producing phantomatic images, spectralizing us in the process. If spectrality is "a trace that marks the presence with its absence in advance", then any semiotic mediation places us in a position of a spectre: "Our disappearance is already here" (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 117).

Indeed, one of the rare double spreads dated 2014, positioning itself in a near-paratextual, *faux*-documentary "now", presents an image of a woman looking straight at the observer, saying: "I've just had a *déjà vu*". In that moment, a deictic shift becomes available exclusively through all of the devices described above: the reader manifests (to the character, but also to themselves) as a spectre, a subject of that "it is here again" phenomenon, seeming to "reappear" in the house even if this is their first reading. A work of mourning commences, but it is unclear who is the mourner and who is the missing object.

THE PROTOTYPE

In conclusion, we return to the point of view which puts all of these processes in motion: if it is transtemporal, more attuned to haecceities of dispersed agencies than to clearly recognizable stories with human protagonists, do we really need a subjectivity to support the structure of *Here*? In a well-known passage, Deleuze and Guattari write:

> A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 4)

Of course, the quality of images, the type of spatial perception observed in the panels, conventions in depicting perspective, jointly imply not only an optic nerve, a human observer, but a cultural history of producing books and narratives with mimetic claims. If narrative drawing is always anthropocentric (Groensteen 2007: 161), then even a book like this, warning us that representation is intrinsically entangled in correlation, does so by recourse to a long history of narrative and figurative art. However, I have tried to put an emphasis on its aspects which try to defeat this constraint, and they are equally found in the formal features (framing, sequencing), in the choice of content, and in the intratextual temporal scope.

A question remains: if *Here* is a study of a viewpoint (as a transtemporal observation archive of a material singularity and all possible juxtapositions of its "present moments"), available to us for inspection, immersion and temporary inhabitation, but without an implication of a subject as the prime agency of observing and archiving, what is the platform that allows recall of all temporal points and a virtual entry into a specific location? Bakhtin writes: "the text is always imprisoned in dead material of some sort: in the early stages of literature's development, that is, in inscriptions (on stone, brick, leather, papyrus, paper); later on, the inscribing could take the form of a book" (Bakhtin 1981: 253). If a book is truly a material prison of a narrative artwork, what would be an appropriate vessel for this content that a book allegedly keeps in check?

In *Here*, this would have to be something artificial, produced by a certain technology: not a consciousness testifying to its life by telling a story (while occasionally projecting beyond its own lifespan and cultural reach), but an apparatus providing an access point and a program for manipulating a network of elements. This platform disarticulates time into coincidences and parallelisms, supplanting causality as the first principle of narration, and reinstating narrativity

on another, transtemporal level. A "metatemporality" reached this way defies our accustomed ways of reading, but it is not a "mystical" state of a deeper meaning conveyed by everything being interconnected; what makes it "otherworldly" is simply an abolition of sequence in favour of a spatial configuration, demanding a different approach. But does such technically founded metatemporality exist – as a network of content, providing a multitude of non-causal juxtapositions, suggesting a possibility of causality and narrative (depending on our preference, or maybe simply on our chance traversal of the elements offered)?

Here is, among other things, a book of speculative fiction, and it suggests several future technologies. There is an inkling of self-referentiality in a 2050 scene where a man is invited to choose a geometrical shape floating in space, vaguely reminiscent of transtemporal inserts, and then push his head through it: a much younger man (or a younger version of himself) emerges on the other side, apparently endowed with a new sensorium as well, probably provided by a virtual reality technology uniting 3D "windows" with a Gibsonian SimStim. The segments taking place in the 23rd century go even further than this literal "immersion" and actually present a technology of "transtemporal reconstruction", granting insight into the far past: its interface opens across a page spread like a spectrum, displaying sections of the room in different decades. This program has the ability to accurately and simultaneously present a chosen location in different points in time, arranging the temporal sections as a multitude of layers which can be combined and fragmented at will.

This would, therefore, be an excellent contender if we were attempting to identify the point of view guiding us through *Here*: the features of this fictional program largely coincide with the structure of the book itself,[29] and – depending on our preference – we could even explain its atypical storytelling strategy either as a series of glitches in its operation (broken images, partial reconstructions, non-sequentiality), or as a shorthand "demo" of its full narrative abilities.

In fact, there is a recurrent and prominent theme of technical development in *Here*, focusing on methods of visual documentation – from painting, through photography and home-made films, to digital media platforms. In several instances, a previous technology is presented as being subsumed by another, more advanced one, or integrated into its repertoire of functions; this offers a chance not only for some impressive metanarrative embedding (a scene we are observing

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[29] Konstantinou reaches a similar conclusion: what the intratextual users of this program experience is "nothing other than a version of *Here* itself" (Konstantinou 2015).

in "real time" in 1959 becomes – identically reproduced – a film projection in 1973), but also for some games with ontological hierarchies.[30]

Could we take a step further and imagine an advanced technology that would encompass or even surpass the options offered by these future inventions? If every one of these devices competently represents the ones preceding it while surpassing them, can we envision the one on the top of the pyramid, so to speak? What would be the "final" technical platform able to represent all of the others, perhaps even able to display the future itself?

This is where the *codex* unexpectedly returns. Just as many commentators have compared this book to a room that "contains" all of the rooms presented in it (and has the capacity to represent all of their other moments), the device containing all other technologies, representing them and their future interfaces *in advance*, could be this very book. Compared to the virtual reality simulation presented in the story, *Here* actually gives the impression of an advanced platform, capable of looking into the future as well: it is a machine that conceptually contains all possible configurations of given content. The Aleph ceases to be a figment of imagination, represented within a fictional narrative; the book itself is implied as its true and ultimate embodiment. From this viewpoint, Richard McGuire's *Here* suddenly appears to be a deeply anachronous, impossible artifact, a rough model of this future technology (the incipient transtemporal "reconstruction and visualization program"): its prototype.

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[30] Bieber Lake points to a 1935 scene where a doll house in the corner of the room identically reproduces the room containing it, while an insert on the same page suggests that a girl looking into the fireplace is actually looking into the year 22,175 (Bieber Lake 2019: 151).

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