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**Liesbeth FRANÇOIS and María Paz OLIVER**

Space and Everyday Life

Transformations and Tensions in Contemporary Fiction

### **Abstract**

This issue centers on the different ways in which contemporary fiction proposes a reflection on everyday space. Set aside as the setting for everything that takes place on a regular basis and that practically goes unnoticed, everyday space nevertheless accounts for the diverse transformations and tensions of the globalized world, as well as the urban dynamics that describe the politics of contemporary everyday life. Considered from the different angles of various literary traditions, this issue raises the question of everyday space in the prose fiction of the last 25 years, particularly in works that venture to explore the diversity of spaces and temporalities that characterize contemporary everydayness through two major tensions: the one between the public and private dimension and the other one between the determining aspect and the creative potential that both have been associated with everyday space.

### **Resumen**

Este número está centrado en los distintos modos en que la ficción contemporánea plantea una reflexión sobre el espacio cotidiano. Relegado a todo aquello que acontece de manera habitual y que prácticamente pasa desapercibido, el espacio cotidiano, sin embargo, da cuenta de las diversas transformaciones y tensiones del mundo globalizado, como también de las dinámicas urbanas que describen las políticas de la vida diaria en la actualidad. Desde distintas tradiciones literarias, este número plantea la pregunta por el espacio cotidiano en la narrativa de últimos 25 años, particularmente en obras que exploran la diversidad de espacios y temporalidades que caracterizan la cotidianidad contemporánea, a través de dos tensiones mayores: por un lado, entre la dimensión pública y privada y, por otro, entre el aspecto determinante y el poder creativo asociados al espacio cotidiano.

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## SPACE AND EVERYDAY LIFE Transformations and Tensions in Contemporary Fiction

Despite its unquestionable evidence, the everyday eludes definition. Indeed, the very immediacy related to the idea of the everyday somehow explains the absolute vagueness of this concept because of its allusion to those daily activities that, by their very common or usual nature, are often kept out of all analysis. But then, how should we address the everyday? To what limits is it restrained? How should we describe it? Although the alleged certainty of the everyday tends to prevent the necessary critical distance to reflect on this phenomenon, the large number of contemporary works that ponder upon the spaces of everyday life from different literary traditions, not just discloses the infinite possibilities of representing this concept, but also accounts for its topicality. The different theoretical approaches to everyday space provide a reference point to analyze the way in which contemporary fiction invests spaces of everyday life with a literary perspective, and how those spaces are addressed through an unresolved tension between the public and the private spheres, on the one hand, and between the determinist aspect and the creative power that have been associated to everyday space, on the other.

Throughout the reflections on the everyday, critics often insist on the indeterminate nature of this concept. Already in his short essay “Approches de quoi?” (1973), Georges Perec points out the paradox of the everyday: on the one hand, it seems to refer to anything that it is opposed to the meaningful or eloquent – which, according to Perec, constitutes the object of the press – and, on the other, it would appeal to the very sense of our existence. In the act of questioning the ordinary, which is everything that we are so accustomed to that it practically goes unnoticed, Perec proposes a new way to recapture the meaning of the everyday. As opposed to the extraordinary, Perec argues that within the study of everydayness, which he also describes as the “infraordinary”<sup>1</sup>, would lie the possibility of an anthropology based on how these everyday spaces manage to truly describe what we are: “What’s needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us, will look in ourselves for what for so long we’ve been pillaging from others. Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic”<sup>2</sup>. As noted by Perec, it is exactly this trivial

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1. Ben Highmore defines this concept as “an everydayness that requires a kind of quixotic or excessive attention. Perec uses neologisms like ‘infra-ordinary’ and ‘endotic’ to describe an everyday that is neither ordinary nor extraordinary, neither banal nor exotic”. Ben HIGHMORE, *The Everyday Life Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, 176.

2. Georges PEREC, “Approches de quoi?”, en *L’infra-ordinaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1989, 11-12. “Peut-être s’agit-il de fonder enfin notre propre anthropologie: celle qui parlera de nous, qui ira chercher en nous ce que nous avons si longtemps pillé chez les autres. Non plus l’exotique, mais l’endotique”. Translation : Ben HIGHMORE, *The Everyday Life Reader*, Trans. John Sturrock, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, 177-178.

aspect of the everyday that is the essential condition to interrogate experience. Investigating the objects and spaces that make up daily life is the starting point for a better understanding of the everyday. These objects and spaces include everything that no longer surprises us and which Percey predominantly observes in urban space: “Describe your street. Describe another street. Compare. [...] It matters a lot to me that [these questions] should seem trivial and futile: that’s exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we’ve tried in vain to lay hold on our truth”<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout the theoretical discussions on this subject, especially since the mid-twentieth century in France, space appears as a crucial dimension in thinking everydayness: in particular, the manner in which those spaces associated with daily routines describe the rhythms of modernity from that immediate present seems essential. The space of the city and its socio-political dimension are especially relevant for the reflection on the everyday, as has already been noted by, for instance, the Situationist movement, and particularly by Guy Debord and Raoul Vaneigem when they elaborate on the transformative potential of aimless movement in urban space that seeks to subvert the hegemonic effects of capitalism. Accordingly, they emphasize certain everyday practices, such as wandering through the streets of Paris or the distortion of a common meaning associated with a certain object – the *dérive* and *détournement* –, that seek to redefine the identity of urban space and evoke its emotional component<sup>4</sup>. Thus, by taking up the political aspect of the *flâneur*, the Situationist experiments claim that the power of everyday space challenges the control mechanisms of capitalist society.

Within the debate on the nature of everyday space, Henri Lefebvre’s and Maurice Blanchot’s theories offer two perspectives that help understand both its ambiguity and its creative-subversive potential. When considering the impact of capitalism and the industrialization of human life, Henri Lefebvre, in his work *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947), includes the everyday in the field of everything that explains the division between work and other activities related to leisure and family life, i.e., what had been the bedrock of life itself during the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup>. According to Lefebvre, the specialization of work and the tendency towards a society defined by the logic of production and consumption, aim to isolate one’s private activities and those where there is pleasure involved, so that the everyday reveals itself as an alienating effect of capitalist society. The ambiguity of the everyday in Lefebvre’s theory is thus understood as the residue of any specialized activity, that either belongs to the intellectual or the philosophical domain, or those who are generally associated with the extraordinary, the artistic or the heroic: “Everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by ‘what is left over’ after all distinct,

3. *Ibid.*, 12-13. “Décrivez votre rue. Décrivez-en une autre. Comparez. [...] Il m’importe beaucoup qu[e les questions] semblent triviales et futiles: c’est précisément ce qui les rend tout aussi, sinon plus, essentielles que tant d’autres au travers desquelles nous avons vainement tenté de capter notre vérité” (trans. in HIGHMORE, 178). In this sense, Percey also refers to the spatial dimension of the everyday in *Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien* (1975).

4. Among the decisive works to understand the situationist movement are Guy Debord’s *La société du spectacle* (1967) and Raoul Vaneigem’s *Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations* (1967). “Théorie de la dérive” by Guy Debord, and “Mode d’emploi du détournement”, written by Debord in collaboration with Gil J. Wolman, that were both published in 1956 in the journal *Les Lèvres Nues*, also propose a critical approach to capitalist society in the creation of ludic situations in the everyday realm. Cf. Simon SADLER, *The Situationist City*, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1999.

5. Cf. Henri LEFEBVRE, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947), Paris, L’Arche, 1958, 32-33.

superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality. Considered in their specialization and their technically, superior activities leave a ‘technical vacuum’ between one another which is filled up by everyday life”<sup>6</sup>.

As Lefebvre points out, the concept of the everyday implies a progressive differentiation between the domains of family and work, that is to say, the configuration of a space that is described in tension with pleasure. Hence the ambiguity of the everyday is also understood as a paradox: we work so that we can afford spaces of pleasure, but the only way of obtaining these is by working. Therefore, according to Lefebvre, the space of everyday life refers to the cyclical monotony of the capitalist system and its control mechanisms<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, the necessity arises to break that cycle in the everyday space, to fashion a liberating space for distraction, but also to create a critical distance with respect to these social dynamics. In this regard, in his “Perspectives de modifications conscientes dans la vie quotidienne” (1961), Guy Debord notes that the supposed triviality of everyday life is only an idea that has been violently imposed by consumer society, in order for boredom to create the desire to fill the everyday vacuum with more consumption<sup>8</sup>. This way, everyday space both reinvigorates the logic of capitalism, as well as it provides a critical reflection on these logics.

As a symptom of the radical indeterminacy of the concept, everyday life oscillates between the anonymity of everything that is irrelevant or that stays unnoticed, and a certain creative potential that challenges the politics of modernity. In this sense, for Maurice Blanchot the everyday refers to the insignificant – “Nothing happens, this is the everyday”<sup>9</sup> –, but also to something that has the potential to break structures and, as he argues in “La Parole quotidienne” (1959), to question all kind of authority: “inexhaustible, irrecusable, always unfinished daily that always escapes forms or structures (particularly those of political society: bureaucracy, the wheels of government, parties)”<sup>10</sup>. Thus, beyond the mere ambiguity of the term, a positive sense of everyday life predominates, which is particularly expressed in the space of the city, as Michael Sheringham observes both in the theory of Blanchot and in the French *avant-garde* movements; this way, the elusiveness of the ordinary finds a particular mode of expression to reflect on this phenomenon in the experience and representation of the city<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, in his

6. “En un sens résiduelle, définie par ‘ce qui reste’ lorsque par analyse on a ôté toutes les activités distinctes, supérieures, spécialisées, structurées, la vie quotidienne se définit comme totalité. Considérées dans leur spécialisation et leur technicité, les activités supérieures laissent entre elles un ‘vide technique’ que remplit la vie quotidienne”. *Ibid.*, 97. (Translation: Henri LEFEBVRE, *Critique of The Everyday Life*, Trans. John Moore, London, Verso, 1991, 97).

7. See Henri LEFEBVRE, “Everyday Everydayness”, 1972, in *Yale French Studies*, 73, 1987, 9-11.

8. Guy DEBORD, “Perspectives for conscious alternations in everyday life”, in Ben HIGHMORE, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 239-243.

9. Maurice BLANCHOT, “La Parole quotidienne”, en *L’Entretien infini*, Paris, Gallimard, 1989, 360. “Rien ne se passe, voilà le quotidien”. Translation: Maurice BLANCHOT, “Everyday Speech”, Trans. Susan Hanson, in *Yale French Studies*, 1987, 73, 12-20. Similarly, in “Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien” Percec defines the everyday as “what happens when nothing happens” (“ce qui se passe quand il ne se passe rien”) (our translation). Georges PEREC, “Tentative d’épuisement d’un lieu parisien”, Toulouse, Université de Toulouse, 1993, 12.

10. *Ibid.*, 357. “inépuisable, irrécusable et toujours inaccompli et toujours échappant aux formes ou aux structures (en particulier celles de la société politique : bureaucratie, rouages gouvernementaux, partis)”. Translation: Maurice BLANCHOT, “Everyday Speech”, 13.

11. Michael SHERINGHAM, *Everyday Life. Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, 19.

essay, Blanchot restricts the space of the everyday to the streets of the city, and even privileges it over the family space of the house: “The everyday is not at home in our dwelling-places, it is not in offices or churches, any more than in libraries or museums. It is in the streets – if it is anywhere. Here I find again one of the beautiful moments of Lefebvre’s books. The streets, he notes, has the paradoxical character of having more importance than the places it connects, more living reality than the things it reflects”<sup>12</sup>.

Since the 1970s, several approaches revert to this vision of space – and especially the space of the city – as the preeminent medium where the contradictions of everyday life are expressed. Henri Lefebvre develops his theory of the city as a system that encodes the relations of production in *Le droit à la ville* (1968) and, also addresses this spatial dimension from a more general point of view in *La production de l’espace* (1974). The latter is a panoramic work on space as a social product that is dominated by the progressive installation of the capitalist system. Considering space not as a neutral scenery, but rather as a substance determined by relations and social practices, this contribution will be of critical importance to the exponents of the so-called *spatial turn*. Lefebvre criticizes both what he calls the realistic illusion, which consists of reducing space to its material and quantifiable aspect, as well as the illusion of transparency of a pure and translucent space, linked to mathematics and philosophy<sup>13</sup>. Thus Lefebvre vindicates the complexity of space in that it would not be reducible neither to an abstract system, nor to a completely empirical reality. This work also makes a distinction between perceived, conceived and lived space. Apart from the plans of urbanists and scientists – conceived space –, Lefebvre discerns a set of practices that perpetuate the logic of society – perceived space –, and a symbolic dimension of space, which corresponds to the most intimate relations we establish with places through which we circulate – lived space<sup>14</sup>. This last dimension contains the transformative and artistic potential of everyday space.

This tension between the codified urban system and the intimate experience of the geographical environment will echo in Michel de Certeau’s *L’invention du quotidien* (1980). De Certeau explains the distinction between strategies – conscious calculations by a subject or an instance, which counts on a well established and proper place within a system of power – and **tactics – improvised actions that attempt to exploit a specific situation without any stable anchor point –**, and defends the latter as seeds of a minimal everyday resistance to the regulated system of the ‘concept city’, which is similar to Lefebvre’s conceived space. Metaphorically speaking, the city acts as the set of rules that govern language from a hegemonic perspective, and the minimum displacements within the city are equivalent to a subjective appropriation which, ultimately, is the act of enunciation. By means of walking, artistic and creative experience can emerge among the predetermined structures of the official language: “These practices of space refer to a specific

12. Maurice BLANCHOT, “La Parole quotidienne”, 362. “Le quotidien n’est pas au chaud dans nos demeures, il n’est pas dans les bureaux ni dans les églises, pas davantage dans les bibliothèques ou les musées. Il est – s’il est quelque part – dans la rue. Ici, je retrouve l’un des beaux moments des livres de Lefebvre. La rue, note-t-il, a ce caractère paradoxal d’avoir plus d’importance que les endroits qu’elle relie, plus de réalité vivante que les choses qu’elle reflète”. Translation: Maurice BLANCHOT, “Everyday Speech”, 17.

13. Henri LEFEBVRE, *La production de l’espace*, Paris, Anthropos, 1974, 36-39.

14. *Ibid.*, 42-43.

form of *operations* ('ways of operating'), to 'another spatiality', (an 'anthropological', poetic and mythic experience of space), and to an *opaque and blind* mobility characteristic of the bustling city. A *migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city"<sup>15</sup>. This metaphorical city is connected to a mobile heritage, which consist of the tactics that have historically been used by a community to negotiate power structures. As such, the 'place' of streets and buildings becomes a 'space', an activated set of mobile elements.

Similarly, in the Anglophone academy, the notion of 'place' as opposed to 'space' begins to circulate with a different valuation. The humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan distances himself from the abstractions of the spatial sciences of that moment, and proposes the concept of 'place' to designate an established area that has become valuable because of the daily practices of its inhabitants. In *Space and Place* (1977), he states that "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value [...] From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa"<sup>16</sup>. Edward Relph in *Place and Placelessness* (1976) revisits the ideas of Tuan, and warns against the increased risk of uniformization of places: "An inauthentic attitude towards places is transmitted through a number of processes [...] which directly or indirectly encourage 'placelessness', that is, a weakening of identity of places to the point where they not only look alike and feel alike but offer the same bland possibilities for experience"<sup>17</sup>. Thus, 'place' is associated with parameters of authenticity and the threatening loss of a sense of community.

In the 80s, various researchers in human geography, including David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Derek Gregory, criticized these ideas from a postmodern point of view. As they were skeptical towards the notions of authenticity proposed by Tuan and Relph, they emphasized the idea of 'place' as a social construct that often results from exclusionary actions<sup>18</sup>. By integrating Lefebvre's legacy, which so far had gone unnoticed in the Anglophone academia, they stimulated an interdisciplinary dialogue with cultural studies and critical theory, aiming to reposition space as an essential factor for political and social analysis. This led Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies. The reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) to proclaim a *spatial turn* in the humanities, noting that "[a] distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought"<sup>19</sup>. Likewise, theories that paved the way for the paradigmatic shift noticed by Soja have inspired several approaches in human sciences, which, from the 1990s onwards, rediscover the social, political and poetic value of everyday space. Moreover, these theories

15. Michel DE CERTEAU, *L'Invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire* (1980), Paris, Gallimard, 1990, 141-142. "Ces pratiques de l'espace renvoient à une forme spécifique d'*opérations* (des « manières de faire »), à « une autre spatialité » (une expérience « anthropologique », poétique et mythique de l'espace), et à une mouvance *opaque et aveugle* de la ville habitée. Une ville *transhumante*, ou métaphorique, s'insinue ainsi dans le texte clair de la ville planifiée et lisible". Translation: Michel DE CERTEAU, *The practice of everyday life*, Trans. Steven Randall, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1988, 93.

16. Yi-Fu TUAN. *Space and Place*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003 (1977), 6.

17. Edward RELPH. *Place and Placelessness*, London, Pion, 1976, 90.

18. Tim CRESSWELL. *Place: a short introduction*. Malden, Blackwell, 2004, 26-29.

19. Edward SOJA, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London, Verso, 1989, 11.



transcend the Marxist matrix in which much of the theoretical work on space originated, by adopting a perspective that can be described as postmodern, or as a sociological point of view that shifts focus to the most recent transformations of the contemporary world.

Furthermore, in her study “The Invention of Everyday Life” (1999-2000) Rita Felski proposes three perspectives for understanding the everyday: firstly, the temporal, where the everyday is expressed in the form of repetition, as a cyclical time opposed to the linear time of modern industrial society; secondly, the modal, which manifests itself in the habits of daily routine; and thirdly, the spatial, where the temporal dimension acquires a reference point to define daily experience<sup>20</sup>. Nonetheless, unlike its temporal aspect, everyday space lacks clear limits, seeing that it includes a heterogeneous variety of spaces – the street, the workplace, the home, the mall –, and different forms of movement associated to these spaces, ranging from the simple act of walking to other modes of transportation, such as driving or flying<sup>21</sup>. Accordingly, the apprehension of contemporary everyday space emphasizes the importance of different types of motion and its relationship with new technologies of displacement.

Hence, the theoretical production in recent years underlines the strong interest in rearticulations and redefinitions of everyday space that have defined the last two decades. Among them, Fredric Jameson emphasizes the experience of geographical confusion that resulted from a spatial mutation that succeeded in undermining the capacity “to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world”<sup>22</sup>. In the past 25 years, this experience of disorientation has been intensified. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reflection on everyday space must be reinstated within the framework of a globalization that, often from a neoliberal perspective, minimizes the role of nation-states; and especially in a context of increasing migration flows and the accelerated development of technological advances, including widespread Internet access. These factors strongly influence the perception of everyday space, the configuration of its places and its symbolic value. In this regard, Saskia Sassen describes the modern city in the book *A Sociology of Globalization* (2007) as the space where this global dimension is properly expressed: “Cities emerge as one territorial or scalar moment in a transurban dynamic. The city here is not a bounded unit but a complex structure that can articulate a variety of cross-boundary processes and reconstitute them as a partly urban condition. [...] It is one of the spaces *of* the global, and it engages the global directly, often bypassing the national”<sup>23</sup>. Consequently, Sassen emphasizes this overall urban network as a central feature of the architecture of the current phase of globalization<sup>24</sup>.

In the last two decades, literary discourse has taken a particular interest in these social transformations. In tension with a literature that focuses on the extraordinary, recent prose fiction often turns its eyes towards the questions

20. Rita FELSKI, “The Invention of Everyday Life”, in *New Formations*, 1999/2000, 39, 15-31.

21. *Ibid.*, 22.

22. Frederick JAMESON, *The Cultural Turn*, London, Verso, 1998, 15.

23. Saskia SASSEN, *A Sociology of Globalization*, New York & London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2007, 102.

24. Saskia SASSEN, *The Global City. Second edition*, Princeton, UNP, 2001, 354.

raised by contemporary everyday space and initiates a dialogue with the theoretical approaches that describe it. For instance, the everyday is reconsidered as a literary theme in “ethnofiction”<sup>25</sup>. In *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (1992), Marc Augé argues that “it is that the contemporary world itself, with its accelerated transformations, is attracting anthropological scrutiny: in other words, a renewed methodical reflection on the category of otherness.”<sup>26</sup>. With the concept of the ‘non-place’, Augé gathers all transit spaces that break into the fabric of everyday space as manifestations of the new ways of displacement and consumption: airports, railway stations, public transportation, malls, etc. In *Journal d’un SDF: ethnofiction* (2011), Augé resorts to fictional narrative discourse in order to ethnographically explore the conditions of the homeless.<sup>27</sup> In a similar way, as noted by Michael Sheringham, several contemporary French writers, such as Annie Ernaux, François Maspero and Jacques Réda, pay attention to everyday life in non-places. At the same time, in Latin American literature of the past ten years, Josefina Ludmer has noted a tendency to represent the “territorial practices of everyday life”, with fictions that “fabricate present with everyday reality and this is one of their politics”<sup>28</sup>. Likewise, Beatriz Sarlo observes a predominance of fictions that express the everyday merely as an “ethnographic representation of the present”<sup>29</sup>, instead of creating a totalizing story or one that is framed by a clear-cut plot.

Nevertheless, the interest in these tendencies does not limit itself to a thematic perspective, but also gives way to new perspectives and experiments on a formal level. As Michael Sheringham comments on a text by Jean Jamin, the writings that pay attention to an ethnographic approach are often fragmentary, and aim at imitating the confusion of the world they analyze: “Distance and temporal disparity are part of the force of ethnography; an anthropology of the modern world can only be understood in postmodern terms of pastiche, textuality and the end of history”<sup>30</sup>. In her introduction to the special issue of *Temps Zéro*, which deals with the narration of everyday life, Marie-Pascale Huglo also emphasizes the tendency to resort to “small narratives” when the “master narratives” have lost their credibility, and she notes that the attention shifts towards the heterogeneity of the local. She concludes that form is a decisive aspect in this respect: “Playing more

25. The idea of “ethnofiction” was initially associated with the cinema of Jean Rouch, where it referred to a form that presented an ethnographical analysis starting from the fictional reenactment of the histories of real persons. Johannes SJÖBERG, “Ethnofiction: drama as a creative research practice in ethnographic film”, en *Journal of Media Practice*, 2008, 9:3, 229-242. However, the concept has also been applied to literature, as is the case of Marc Augé, for instance.

26. Marc AUGÉ, *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, París, Seuil, 1992, 35. “[c’est] le monde contemporain lui-même qui, du fait de ses transformations accélérées, appelle le regard anthropologique, c’est-à-dire une réflexion renouvelée et méthodique sur la catégorie de l’altérité”. Translation: Marc AUGÉ. *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Trans. John Howe, London, New York, Verso, 1995, 24.

27. Marc Augé, *Journal d’un SDF: ethnofiction*, París, Seuil, 2011.

28. Among the novels that represent everyday reality, or what Ludmer calls “postautonomy”, are listed *Bolivia Construcciones*, by Bruno Morales; *Montserrat*, by Daniel Link; *La villa*, by César Aira; and *Ocio*, by Fabián Casas. Cf. Josefina LUDMER, *Aquí América Latina. Una especulación*, Buenos Aires, Eterna Cadencia, 2010, 150-151. “prácticas territoriales de lo cotidiano”, “[f]abrican presente con la realidad cotidiana y esa es una de sus políticas.” (our translation).

29. Sarlo exemplifies this phenomenon in the work of César Aira, particularly in the novels *La villa* and *Las noches de Flores*, and in *Los pichicigos*, by Rodolfo Fogwill. Cf. Beatriz SARLO, “La novela después de la historia. Sujetos y tecnologías”, en *Escritos sobre literatura argentina*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2007, 471-482. “representación etnográfica del presente” (our translation).

30. Michael SHERINGHAM, *Everyday Life*, 298.

often than not with generic heterogeneity and narrative fragmentation, but not hesitating either to reclaim the long tradition of the novel, shying away from the artifices of fiction or multiplying them at its taste, prose fiction of the everyday converts questions of form into a decisive theme without which there would be no way to say, and even less to narrate”<sup>31</sup>. Contemporary fiction still aims at a better comprehension of everyday space, but it takes full conscience of the complex relations that it establishes with the contemporary world. They are irreducible to any traditional idea of representation: “Its transitivity, however, does not imply a naïve belief in the possibility of a direct reflection on the world. It rather equates the affirmation that there is no reality outside the representations that are necessary, from now on, to experiment, imagine, and interrogate the worlds to which it gives shape and visibility”<sup>32</sup>.

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The purpose of this special issue is to study how prose fiction of the last 25 years links discourses about space and the everyday, and in what manner it represents the spatiotemporal changes that are characteristic of this period.

Broadly speaking, this literary exploration examines the treatment of two major tensions that traverse all of the reflections on everyday space. The most evident one, which also dominates theoretical perspectives on the experience of everyday space, is the tension between the public and the private. Contrary to the total openness and the social vocation of public space, the house appears as the most typical everyday space, and as a place that symbolically constructs an extension of the self<sup>33</sup>. Agnes Heller notes that the house is the immediate space of reference for the everyday, a place where not only the sense of home or of the familiar is negotiated, but in the first place the emotional experience of space: “Everyday contact takes place in its own space. This space is anthropocentric. At its centre there is always a human being living an everyday life. It is this everyday life that articulates his space, in which experience of space and perception of space are indissolubly fused together”<sup>34</sup>. This anthropocentric dimension of everyday space is established according to the proximity or distance with respect to the self. Nonetheless, Lefebvre stresses that modernity promotes life outside the house, displacement, and movement in the streets. This vision generates a tension with respect to the desire of returning homewards and displaces the reflection on the everyday to urban space. Even though, at first sight, the house is associated

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31. Marie-Pascale HUGLO, “Présentation”, in *Temps Zéro. Dossier : Raconter le quotidien aujourd’hui*, 2007, 1. “Jouant plus souvent qu’autrement d’une hétérogénéité générique et d’une fragmentation narrative, mais n’hésitant pas non plus à revendiquer la grande tradition du roman, fuyant les artifices de la fiction ou les multipliant à l’envi, les proses narratives du quotidien font des questions de forme un enjeu décisif sans quoi il n’y aurait pas moyen de dire, de raconter encore moins.” (our translation)

32. *Ibid.* “La transativité n’implique pas pour autant une croyance naïve dans la possibilité de refléter directement le monde. Elle revient plutôt à affirmer qu’il n’y a pas de réalité en dehors des représentations avec lesquelles il faut désormais compter pour expérimenter, imaginer, interroger les mondes auxquels elles donnent forme et visibilité.” (our translation).

33. Rita FELSKE, “The Invention of Everyday Life”, 25.

34. Agnes HELLER, “Everyday Space”, en *Everyday Life*, Trans.. G.L. Campbell, London, Boston, Merbourne & Henley, Routledge, 1984, 236.

with a sense of familiarity and protection, this sense is questioned from a feminist perspective: the connotations of security would more likely correspond to a masculine description of a space that can also be the synonym of risk and violence<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, in a postmodern context that is characterized by a mobility that tends to reformulate spatial categories and the limits of everyday space, the notion of the house in the sense of ‘home’ becomes more complex and sometimes even impossible<sup>36</sup>.

In opposition to the feminine vision on everyday life in the private sphere, and as Naomi Schor observes, public space would express a masculine vision of urban space, where the everyday is a zone likely to reflect power relations<sup>37</sup>. In a similar vein, for Michel de Certeau, the displacement in urban space searches to reveal these logics of power contained in the everyday. As a place of enunciation and a way of exploring urban space, walking would be one of the most effective strategies to appropriate space<sup>38</sup>. The act of walking transfers the everyday to the rhythm of the modern big city and to the uniformity of a multitude that, as Walter Benjamin concludes from the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, fascinates as well as terrifies<sup>39</sup>. Yet this activity would encounter various obstacles in post-modern cities, where, according to Rebecca Solnit, “[s]uburbs are bereft of the natural glories and civic pleasures of those older spaces, and suburbanization has radically changed the scale and texture of everyday life, usually in ways inimical to getting about on foot”<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, the figure of the *flâneur*, whom Baudelaire and Benjamin still saw as a gifted personality with an artistic and redemptory perspective within the urban chaos, has been reinterpreted by Zygmunt Bauman as the personification of both *zapping* and the consumerist attitudes in the contemporary world: this questions the creative potential that has been attributed to walking<sup>41</sup>.

A second point that structures the discussion on contemporary everyday space refers to the tension between determination and creativity as two opposite terms. In this case, the central question concerns the transformative potential of the everyday and its link with surrounding space. Following the line that goes from the nineteenth-century *flâneur* to the ideas of the surrealists and situationists, the places that have fallen into disuse as well as the streets of the cities would hide a symbolic and redemptory potential that can be made visible through writing or strolling. Additionally, for Percec, the study of everyday spaces is a way of recuperating our surprise before the world, of “interrogating all that has ceased to astonish

35. Cf. Dolores HAYDEN, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1981.

36. See Paul VIRILIO, *L’Inertie polaire*, Paris, Christian Bourgois, 1994; Iain CHAMBERS, “Leaky Habitats and Broken Grammar”, en George ROBERTSON *et al.* (eds.), *Traveller’s Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, London, Routledge, 1994, 245-249; Elizabeth H. JONES, *Space of Belonging. Home, Culture and Identity in 20th-Century French Autobiography*, Amsterdam & New York, Rodopi, 2007; Roger SILVERSTONE, *Television and Everyday Life*, London & New York, Routledge, 1994.

37. Cf. Naomi SCHOR, “Cartes Postales: Representing Paris 1900”, *Critical Inquiry*, 1992, 2, 188-244; Ben HIGHMORE, *The Everyday Life Reader*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002.

38. Michel DE CERTEAU, *L’invention du quotidien*, Paris, Union générale d’éditions, 1980.

39. Walter BENJAMIN, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, en Ben HIGHMORE, *The Everyday Life Reader*, 45-46.

40. Rebecca SOLNIT, *Wanderlust. A History of Walking*, London, Verso, 2002, 249.

41. Zygmunt BAUMAN, “From pilgrim to tourist – or a short history of identity”, en Stuart HALL & Paul DU GAY, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London, SAGE, 1996, 18-36.

us”<sup>42</sup>. Lefebvre’s and de Certeau’s theories, however, conceive the space of the city as a medium dominated by power structures. Yet both of them also foresee a microscopic and/or symbolic dimension that would allow for the recuperation of spatial experience by the individual.

This idea of resisting a codified system also manifests itself in more recent approaches. In his book *Reanimating places* (2004), Tom Mels reclaims humanistic geography – of which the most important representatives are precisely Tuan and Relph – as “a form of *reanimation* against the reified world of positivist science and technocracy”<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, regarding the contemporary practices of travel and consumption in particular, Laurent Matthey remarks that “the new spaces of sociability are the places of consumption of signs that open a colonization of experience, an instrumentalization of consciences [...] Malls and leisure parks offer a landscape that goes from consumption to *new consumerism*. Then, in all of these spatialized practices, ‘something’ is happening in the subject. It tricks and escapes. And it is a new moment of theorization. The everyday balances between the alienated time of merchandise and the opening of spaces of rebellion”<sup>44</sup>.

It is possible to structure the reflection on the problem of space and everyday life in the contributions to this special issue around these two major tensions. A first set of questions, raised by these articles, points to the definition of everyday space: what is the everyday and in relation to what factors does it define itself in contemporary literature? In what kind of spaces does the everyday unfold itself predominantly in the analyzed texts? Is there a preference for one of the two poles of the tension between public and private space? Can this attention towards public or private space be connected to a spatial sensibility influenced by the most recent transformations in the contemporary world? How are these spaces represented? A second set of questions concentrates on the possibility of a transformative potential of everyday space. Is it possible to find characteristics of the revolutionary utopias of the Surrealists or the Situationists in contemporary narrative? Does a kind of micro-resistance exist that would be comparable with the dimension of lived space in Lefebvre’s works or the tactics in de Certeau’s studies? In this case, the analysis tries to determine whether contemporary everyday space still allows for some kind of appropriation or change on an individual level.

A first theme that connects various articles in this issue focuses on the (im-)possibility of recovering a sense of home and a stable sense of identity. In his study of *Va savoir*, written by the Canadian author Réjean Ducharme, Vincent Gélinas-Lemaire analyzes the spatial structure of the novel, the center of which is situated in the piece of land where its protagonist is building a house for his absent

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42. Georges PEREC, *L’infraordinaire*, 12. “interroger ce qui semble avoir cessé à jamais de nous étonner” (our translation).

43. Tom MELS, *Reanimating Places*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, 8.

44. Laurent MATTHEY. “Le quotidien des systèmes territoriaux”, *Articulo – Journal of Urban Research* 1, 2005. [Online], URL: <http://articulo.revues.org/903> – “[l]es nouveaux espaces de sociabilité sont les lieux de consommation de signes qui ouvrent une colonisation de l’expérience, une instrumentalisation des consciences [...] Les centres commerciaux, les parcs de loisirs, offrent un paysage de la consommation au *new consumerism*. Mais dans toutes ces pratiques spatialisées, ‘quelque chose’ se passe dans le sujet. Il ruse et s’échappe. Et c’est encore un nouveau temps de théorisation. Le quotidien balance entre temps aliéné par la marchandise et ouverture d’espaces de rébellion” (our translation).

wife. He describes the technical dimension of this process, which in its everyday monotony contrasts with events in other places that are more lively or far away. This aspect is complemented by an allegorical dimension that submerges the land and its environments in a terrifying atmosphere given the possibility that his wife may not come back. When she finally does not return, the protagonist manages to reconcile himself with the apparently banal appearance of his everyday space. He picks up the thread of his life and liberates the house from the sinister tones it had taken on in his mind. In her essay, Bieke Willem analyzes the way in which the acts of dwelling and writing have similar functions in the work by two Chilean authors, Alejandro Zambra and Diego Zúñiga. She argues that both acts correspond to a nostalgic search for a sense of home, which always leads to disappointment and dissolves in a postmodernity that is marked by a general absence of references. Through procedures such as the imitation of spoken language, concision and ironic distance, these fictions reinterpret the transformative potential of power structures contained in the everyday by disconnecting it from collective history and valorizing its subjective and individual dimensions. From another point of view, the article by Chantal Dusaillant explores how, in the intimate space of the house or of personal memory, the minimal histories of Germán Marín's *Basuras de Shanghai* establish a link between the individual past and the most recent history of Chile through writing. According to Dusaillant, the author discovers places that are marked by the memory of community life in his "pieces of trash," which refer to the most banal events in his memory. In this context, the indeterminacy of the everyday functions as an alternative to the official versions of history. Thus, these three texts tend to present the private space of home as an absence as well as a quest with uncertain results, where everyday life is assumed or appreciated in its banality.

The essays by Mark Deggan and Gala María Follaco address the public space of the everyday through the representation of the contemporary metropolis. Proposing a critical vision of Marc Augé's concept of the non-place, Mark Deggan studies *Duidao* by Liu Yichang and *Cosmópolis* by Don DeLillo, drawing attention to the affective dimension of urban space in the metropolis in these works. Moreover, he concentrates on the way in which the construction of a discourse linked to the everydayness of these spaces reflects an ecology – a concept that designates the synergic character of the relation between the subject and the spaces through which it circulates. In these works, the representations of Hong Kong and New York City raise the problem of everyday space through the tension between a horizontal and a vertical perspective on the metropolis. While the first perspective refers to the accelerated rhythm of everyday movements and the way in which these movements can be perceived, unconsciously, by free association, the vertical perspective is treated not only as a sign of the expansion and the urban development of the contemporary metropolis, but also as a space that impules reflection and moments of epiphany in the characters. In a similar way, bearing in mind the lack of identity and the transience of the non-places associated with the global city, Gala María Follaco, in her article, recovers the affective perspective from which everyday life in Tokyo is described in the discourse on urban space. She focuses on Japanese literature of the past ten years – particularly on the works by Yoshida Shûichi, Furukawa Hideo and Yoshimoto Banana –, and analyzes how the eve-

ryday appears as an appropriate space to portray the melancholy and solitude that characterizes social relationships in the representation of the metropolis. Beyond the oppressing sensation of the non-places and of metropolitan life in general, Follaco scrutinizes the everydayness of the neighborhoods of Tokyo, and emphasizes how certain acts that typify everyday life, like walking in the city, are capable of evoking images and memories that contrast with the chaotic and indeterminate atmosphere of public space.

The third axis gathers the contributions that link two recurrent themes in the bibliography about the transnationalization of the contemporary world, that is to say, mobility and consumption. Jamie Fudacz describes the conflictive coexistence of traditional spaces with homogenized non-places in Mexico City, which characterizes various works by the Mexican writer Guillermo Fadanelli. She argues that Fadanelli deconstructs ideas of authenticity linked to the anthropological 'place' by questioning the nostalgia that the characters experience when faced with the globalized brands of the products they purchase in the supermarket, or with the large amount of tourists who visit the city. The image of the city as a collection of anonymous spaces is strengthened in Isabelle Choquet's analysis of two Canadian works, *Chronique de la derive douce*, by Dany Laferrière, and *Les aurores montréalaises*, by Monique Proulx. She investigates how these texts transmit the experiences of their migrant characters, who are confronted with a Montreal that is largely converted into a non-place: anonymous, illegible, and characterized by a daily rhythm oriented towards consumption. However, according to Choquet, these works create a small margin of resistance through the imaginary reversal of power relations, which transforms the city itself into an object of consumption for its new members. In her essay, Claire Jones describes the way in which *Hop là! Un deux trois* by Gérard Gavarry mobilizes its spatial structure in order to draw attention to the precarious situation of immigrants in the Parisian suburbs. The banality and monotony of their lives are contrasted with their dreams: these also break into the fabric of the everyday. Jones argues that one of the characters, when he feels threatened by the extension of labor hierarchies into his domestic space and consequently kills the responsible for this intrusion, actually exploits the transformative potential assigned to everyday space by Lefebvre and de Certeau in order to subvert relations of power, even though his act yields uncertain results. The three articles that resort to the themes of mobility and consumption show that these works question notions of authenticity and other hierarchies of value through the apparition of non-places – which are precisely spaces of transit and consumption – in the fabric of everyday space. Facing a spatial structure that is marked by the logic of global economy and social exclusion, the literary responses go from resignation, proceeding through imagination, to extreme manifestations of the revolutionary weight of the everyday.

This way, the articles of this special issue account for the different ways in which everyday space is constructed in contemporary fiction, and the variety of works that explore, from the perspective of different literary traditions, the critical potential of everydayness in the global dynamics of postmodern space. As a counterpoint to the standardizing movement of the globalized world, and particularly against the saturation of the discourse of the extraordinary that is promoted by the international press, everyday space seems to appear in contem-

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porary fiction, not only as an instance to rework the transitory quest for identity, but also as a mode of recuperating and reformulating the precarious character of the real.

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