

SPATIAL CONCEPTS IN BORGES'S STORIES

Bill Richardson

This paper focuses on some of the ways in which spatiality is relevant to Borges's work. Before considering some of his major stories from this perspective, however, it is worth noting an element of theoretical background that underpins much of the discussion that is presented here. This is the notion of the "production of space" formulated by Henri Lefebvre in his 1974 book *La production de l'espace*. There, Lefebvre outlines a three-part categorization that draws attention to some of the key ways in which human beings experience space. The three notions about space that he refers to are what he calls "spatial practice" or *espace perçu*, "representations of space" or *espace conçu*, and "representational spaces."

The first of these, spatial practice, means space as it is perceived and used for description, suggesting the kind of concrete apprehension of space we could associate with the qualities and characteristics of individual places. The second, "espace conçu," means representations of space, space in terms of how it is "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes" (Lefebvre 33).¹ The third and final element of the series is what are called "spaces of representation," or *lieux de représentation*. This refers to ways in which space is used to carry out a transformation by making symbolic use of objects and places, meaning space that the human imagination appropriates and changes. These concepts relate to all three stories

1 Quotations included here are from the English version of the French original, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, published in 1991.

discussed below, but most pointedly to the last one (“Las ruinas circulares”) and will be referred to again in the discussion of that story.

The three stories being considered here are “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” “La muerte y la brújula” and “Las ruinas circulares.” Each of these stories relates quite neatly to a different facet of spatial reality, namely the three dimensions of space that are called *entity*, *location* and *movement*. These terms are being borrowed here from the fields of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics where they are used in order to describe the ways in which languages express spatial notions. The first, *entity*, refers simply to the existence of things; it examines the ways in which languages refer to the existence of material entities. The second concept, *location*, is a reference to that aspect of the linguistic system that tells about *where* a thing is. The third dimension is *movement*, i.e., how languages convey notions of displacement of things from one location to another.

Let us look first at the notion of “entity” in the story “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.” This is, paradoxically, an ideal place to start, since this is a story that posits the existence of a world in which there is *no* spatiality. In the story, Borges dreams up a universe in which there are no material objects; rather, the inhabitants of Tlön are out and out idealists, in the tradition of George Berkeley’s idealism, except that they take his ideas to a level he might not have thought of. We are told in the story that:

Las naciones de ese planeta son –congénitamente– idealistas. Su lenguaje y las derivaciones de su lenguaje –la religión, las letras, la metafísica– presuponen el idealismo. El mundo para ellos no es un concurso de objetos en el espacio; es una serie heterogénea de actos independientes. Es sucesivo, temporal, no espacial. (OC 1: 435)²

The languages spoken by the inhabitants of Tlön do not have nouns in them. Rather, they have noun-like words that are formed by juxtaposing qualities, characteristics and sense-impressions, so that the moon may be referred to as *aéreo-claro sobre oscuro-redondo* or *anaranjado-tenue-del cielo*, or some other such combination. Similarly, we are told that, while there is no word for “moon” itself, there are verbal constructions related to the moon’s activities, so there is a verb which in Spanish might be “lunar” or “lunecer,” and a sentence such as “The moon rose above the river”

2 Page numbers for the stories of Borges refer to the 1996 edition of the *Obras Completas*.

in Tlönian language would translate literally as: “upward behind the on-streaming it mooned.” It goes without saying that our author is weaving and bobbing here as he sets out his description of Tlön: after all, what exactly is this entity, the moon, that the Tlönians can’t seem to refer to directly? And what about these creatures, the Tlönians themselves, who have created these languages without substantives, what kind of material reality do they themselves constitute?

Evidently, what Borges is doing is conducting a kind of thought experiment, one in which we are invited to try to imagine what the world might be like if it conformed to the most extreme version of Berkeleyan idealism. Duddy (135-36) gives an account of Berkeley’s ideas that captures neatly the basic concept of material existence—or lack of it—that Borges is asking us to think about:

Berkeley has effectively defined an object in terms of the ideas or sensations that it *is*, rather than in terms of the ideas or sensations that it causes or produces. The real object is not ... an external material substance that makes its presence felt (or seen) by causing representations in the mind of a perceiver.... Objects of sense are defined entirely in terms of their perceivability. (135-36)

Although Berkeley does not take the notion quite to the humorous extremes that these comments invite us to, Borges does. In his story, our author discusses the existence of “hrönir,” objects dreamed up in accordance with the expectations of a person who is looking for them, and of “ur,” entities that are produced through hope and suggestion. Allowing his imagination to run riot, the author probes these various possibilities, imagining the existence of a universe whose inhabitants are deprived of spatial intuition.

To be more accurate, what Borges does in the story is imagine the existence of a conspiratorial group of experts who dream up such a world and subtly interpolate descriptions of it into doctored volumes of the so-called *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, or write their own encyclopaedias which fortuitously fall into the hands of the narrator and his friends. By this means, the author explicitly draws attention to the fictional nature of the universe he has conjured up, highlighting the fact that it is a world accessible only through *words*—and our imagination. Having said that, and in a twist typical of Borges, even that rational explanation of what is go-

ing on is undermined in the terms of the story itself, when at the end the narrator tells us about some peculiar objects—oddly reminiscent of the “hrönir” and “ur” that we had heard about earlier—that have turned up in various places and are clearly meant as indicators of the ways in which the everyday world in which we live is being “contaminated” by the invented world of Tlön.

The important point for us is the implication that what we could call “entitativity” is at the heart of the matter. For all that there is a strong ludic dimension to this story, the mind-game that transports us into a “world of no substance” manages to convey to us something about the centrality of substance itself. This is because the issue of believability—the degree to which we can have faith in whatever evidence is presented to us about the world around us—is precisely the key concern of the story. More than anything else, the question that seems to be at the heart of it is the relationship between self and world, i.e., our *place in the universe*, and the extent to which we can come to grips with that relationship. The issue, in other words, is whether we can identify any means by which we can know about the nature of the place we inhabit—the universe in which we live—or whether all of what we deem to be knowledge about that place is simply a figment of our imagination. The flight of fancy that we are invited to participate in relies for its effect on the reader’s being sensitized within the text to such issues about the nature of knowledge and the nature of the relationship between the self and the world.

If Tlön is an invented world that ends up offering a comment on the actual world in which we live, “La muerte y la brújula” is based in an identifiable location, but asks us to think about the notion of location itself in two different ways. This detective story is set in Buenos Aires and is centered on four crimes, or pseudo-crimes (since one is a fake crime), and the ways in which these are investigated by two detectives, the plodding policeman Treviranus and the would-be clever sleuth Lönnrot. Each of the crime-scenes is depicted in two ways, one where the location is viewed in conceptual or abstract terms, as a point on a map, the other where it is what we could call a lived space, in terms of the qualities associated with it and how it is perceived by the characters in the story. Much of the effect of the story is achieved through the interplay between these two ways of appreciating the places referred to.

The first of these places is the Hôtel du Nord, the hotel where the murder of the rabbi Yarmolinsky is carried out. When this location is introduced in the story it is referred to in terms of a number of the qualities and features it possesses, and the reader gets a sense of how it would be perceived by someone experiencing it as a lived space. It is described as a tower that combines “la aborrecida blancura de un sanatorio, la numerada divisibilidad de una cárcel y la apariencia general de una casa mala” (OC 1: 499). The seedy image that is conjured up here contributes to the creation of an ominous atmosphere, but the very fact that several lines of text are devoted to conveying these details—in a story less than ten pages long—in itself suggests that those details are important and that the *locus criminalis* is going to be of significance in the development of the story.

Similar details are given in the case of the remaining crime-scenes, as well as the scene of the crime *manqué* when the criminal Red Scharlach pretends he is murdered by assassins wearing clown outfits. Significantly, the first mention of the final crime scene occurs at the very beginning of the story, when the narrator refers to it as the place where the series of killings culminates: “la periódica serie de hechos de sangre que culminaron en la quinta de Triste-le-Roy, entre el interminable olor de los eucaliptos” (OC 1: 499). The mention of the smell of the eucalyptus provides a foretaste of the atmosphere associated with the house and gardens where the killing of Lönnrot himself occurs. It is also a significant detail in terms of the development of this detective story, since it gives the alert reader a concrete clue to the outcome of the riddle at the heart of it, indicating clearly that the message Treviranus later receives, on 1 March, claiming that there will *not* be a fourth killing, must be false. This is because, at the point when he receives that message, we have only learned about three killings, none of which has taken place in Triste-le-Roy.

Before the final killing takes place, however, the message of 1 March and the map that accompanies it invite us to think in a different way about the locations that have been referred to so far. We now appreciate them as abstract locations on a map, rather than in terms of observable qualities and characteristics. Instead, they have become meaningful because of their locations relative to one another.

The two detectives, Treviranus and Lönnrot, proceed in contrasting ways as they undertake their investigations into the series of murders,

one emphasizing the notion of absolute space, the other focusing on relational space. Treviranus's immediate response to the riddle posed by the murder is to focus on where the rabbi's hotel bedroom was located in relation to other places, especially the fact that the room opposite that bedroom is where the wealthy Tetrarch of Galilee was staying. Lönnrot's view of things emphasises the location—the hotel bedroom—in itself, not in terms of how it relates to other locations, but rather as a space characterised by the various books and other objects contained in it. Furthermore, the search he undertakes is avowedly mystical in nature, since it is no less than an attempt to follow the uttering of the mystical name of God, the course he conjectures the murderer has undertaken, given the fact that the rabbi had written on his typewriter “La primera letra del nombre ha sido articulada” (OC 1: 500). Lönnrot's approach, then, is absolute in the sense that it focuses on the crime-scene in itself, to the exclusion of how it relates to the spatial context in which it is set. It could also be considered absolute, however, in the sense that it emphasises the divine, the perennial absolute.

What is most striking is that real success, and a happier outcome to events, could have been achieved if the two types of knowledge had been combined. Had Lönnrot had Treviranus's insight into the true motive for the killing—the murderer's accidental intrusion into Yarmolinsky's room when he was attempting to steal the Tetrarch's jewels—and had Treviranus later appreciated the true significance of the map, there would not have been a fourth victim.

In the end, Lönnrot becomes that victim. At the moment when he is about to be shot, the spatial theme is again reinforced through the victim's own words. Lönnrot tells Scharlach that the four-sided labyrinth within which he has managed to capture him has three sides too many, since it is possible to conceive of a single straight line as a labyrinth. Thus, Scharlach would be able to commit two crimes at points A and B, eight kilometres apart, and then a third crime at point C, half-way between A and B. Lönnrot invites Scharlach to kill him, on a future occasion, at a point D, half-way between A and C. Scharlach accedes to this, promising to kill Lönnrot using that labyrinth which, he says, “consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante” (OC 1: 507). Scharlach's references to the line's invisibility and never-ending nature reflect the fact that the line

in question is not only straight, but infinitely long, and, in geometrical terms, infinitely thin; it is the straight line that forms the circumference of an infinitely large circle. But there is also an allusion here to Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, or at least the version of it known as the Dichotomy Paradox. This suggests the impossibility of motion deriving from the fact that before one can reach another point one must reach half-way to it, and before reaching half-way, one must reach half-way towards that half-way point, etc. Since there is an infinite set of points in a line, it is deemed impossible to get to the destination point. This postulation, allied to the fact that the line Lönnrot is thinking of is infinitely long, suggests that the detective may be wistfully hoping these infinities will enable him to escape whatever trap Scharlach sets for him in a future life.

While the ludic dimension of the puzzle associated with the aspects of spatiality that run through this story is strong in itself, the spatial allusions also carry emotional significance. We must grant that the story is a game, but it is a game with a fatal outcome, and, implicitly at least, it explores the question of coming to terms with death, consistently drawing our attention to the dichotomy of abstraction and concrete realities.

That dichotomy between abstract space and concrete, physical space is also relevant to the story "Las ruinas circulares." Here, the setting is initially depicted as an "unidentifiable place," evoked as a mythical, primeval location, suited to the theme of creation and to the specific task of the magician in the story, the task of dreaming a man into existence. There is the sense of a "lack of identity" in the place, which is in keeping with the same sense of a lack of identity in the protagonist. The magician is described at the beginning of the story as an "hombre gris," and as emerging from the river and crawling through the mud, in terms that suggest a creature's emergence from a primeval slime: "Nadie lo vio desembarcar en la unánime noche, nadie vio la canoa de bambú sumiéndose en el fango sagrado" (OC 1: 451). The references to the setting convey an image of it as an unusual place, not like the "normal" (i.e., Westernized, urban) locations that most of the story's readers are likely to be familiar with. This note of "exoticism" is achieved in a number of ways, including through references to the jungle surrounding the place where the magician carries out his task; references to the mud being "sacred," and references to an

ancient Eastern language, Zend, formerly spoken in the Middle East.³ This constitutes, in effect, an “Orientalist” construction of an exotic location.

The setting is also depicted as having dual qualities, however. On the one hand, as already suggested, it appears to exist outside of the normal parameters of time and space, thereby evoking a kind of “Adamic” primal location—a place from which life can potentially spring. On the other hand, the references to the stone figure at the centre of the clearing, and to its history, add to the sense of a specific location. The stone figure itself is dual, since it is said to depict either a tiger or a horse, and the construction in which it is located is a “ruins,” with a past, and, by implication, a whole series of historical and religious significances. These significances surely mean that the place is a “space of representation,” a location that fulfills certain symbolic functions. The story manages to convey this duality, and in it there is the sense of a tension between a notion of a timeless and placeless setting and an actual place. Thus, it seems that it *is* and, at the same time, *is not* located in time and space.

There is also the sense of a link between the precise, limited location in which the main action occurs and a wider spatial context. This is conveyed partly through reference to the magician’s origins in the South,⁴ in “una de las infinitas aldeas que están aguas arriba, en el flanco violento de la montaña” (OC 1: 451), as well as through the description of the man’s arrival at the place. We follow him from the river as he drags himself from its muddy bank through vegetation that tears at his skin, up to the clearing where the ruins are located. The link with a wider space is also reinforced through the references that are made in the story to the ministrations of a local population that supports the magician by discreetly providing food for him. These people are described simply as “los hombres de la región,” and we get the sense that they melt back into the surrounding jungle after they supply the magician with the sustenance he needs, while he sleeps. These links are established early on in the story, but are eventually ex-

3 In fact, the correct name of the language is “Avestan”, an eastern Iranian language that probably ceased to be used as an everyday spoken tongue in the fifth century BC, but was the sacred language in which Zoroastrianism was passed down through oral tradition (Fernández Ferrer 172-73). The language is also known (incorrectly) as “Zend”.

4 Note how the South is associated in Borges’s work with origins, primal dimensions of human existence, autochthony, more primitive behavior and connections with nature (Roses). See below for further comment on this topic, in relation to the story “El Sur”.

tended, in both directions, to a more-or-less infinite degree. On the one hand, we are taken into the magician's inner consciousness—we traverse his dream-world as he goes about the act of creation through dreaming. On the other hand, the “product” of his dream-world, the creature that he brings into existence, follows a trajectory that goes from the magician himself—the magician's imagination, where he is born—to another ruin, i.e., a similar location in the North, and ultimately, as implied by that creature's indestructibility, to infinity.⁵

Here we may see parallels between the conceptions of space implicit in “Las ruinas circulares” and Lefebvre's “conceptual triad,” since the latter draws attention to some of the key ways in which human beings experience space. Focusing first on “spatial practice,” what Edward Soja (66) calls “materialized, socially produced, empirical space,” we could think of the kind of description of location already referred to and the depiction of the magician's situation vis-à-vis the local population. This offers us a sense of the practicalities of survival, of how this minimal social set-up—of the magician and the surrounding population—is organized, and of the kind of spatial arrangements that it produces. Of course, what we are dealing with in the case of “Las ruinas circulares” is a tale of fantasy, and even this most basic of spatial concepts receives a special kind of treatment within the story. Hence, for instance, the magician's dreamed experiences are expressed in terms of the perception of space, and these allow for the kind of distortion of reality that can occur in dreams. When the magician dreams he is lecturing to an enormous group of students, we get a subtle emphasis on the contradictory aspects of his perception of the size of the group. The narrator draws the reader's attention not only to the paradox of the great distance separating the magician from the last rows of students, and the way in which even those students' faces could be clearly perceived, but also to the link that always exists between space and time, as follows:

5 This “infinity” is, simply, continued existence. The “son” that the magician creates is reported as being someone who can walk through fire, and, when the magician himself walks unharmed through flames and thus realises that he is indestructible, we understand that he can conclude that his son is also. But that continued existence—his own or that of the creature he creates—is not described in the story using the term “immortality”. Such a word is not used at all; rather, the emphasis appears to be on the simpler, and more primal, concept of “continued existence,” which implies as much existence in space as in time.

“nubes de alumnos taciturnos fatigaban las gradas; las caras de los últimos pendían a muchos siglos de distancia y a una altura estelar, pero eran del todo precisas” (OC 1: 52).

The second of Lefebvre’s notions—*espace conçu*, or the ways in which human beings relate to space in terms of the formulation of representations of it, as opposed to their perceptions of it—refers to what Lefebvre calls “conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent.” Lefebvre continues: “Conceptions of space [...] tend towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs” (38-39). Much of Borges’s writing could come under this heading, since we are often reminded in his stories of the ways in which we humans reflect on space and query location in a self-conscious manner. In “Las ruinas circulares,” we can detect this aspect of space in operation when the narrator refers to those locations upriver or downriver where other related events take place. Among these are references to the provenance of the magician himself, such as references to the “Zend” language or the “infinitas aldeas” mentioned earlier, or references to the place where his “son” happens to go after he has been created, e.g.: “Le ordenó que una vez instruido en los ritos, lo enviaría al otro templo despedazado cuyas pirámides persisten aguas abajo” (OC 1: 453).

This is the first of these references, and it occurs in the dream that the magician has when he first dreams into existence the beating heart that is to become eventually the “son” he creates. In that dream, the god of the ruins announces that his name on Earth is Fire, undertakes to breathe life into the magician’s created being and orders him to send the creature to the other ruined temple downstream. Two paragraphs later, we are told that the magician does just that, having kissed his “son” and erased all traces of the memory of the act of creation from his mind. The third and final reference to the other temple occurs when the magician learns that there is a man—described as “mágico”—in a temple in the North, who can walk through fire without being burned. This constitutes a kind of turning point in the story and is linked directly to the dramatic climax, the moment when the “conceptualized space,” represented here by the images of the temples and their locations with respect to each other, contributes to the revelation of the spectral nature of the magician himself. The

conceptualization of those spatial locations, in other words, forms part of the imaginative framework that leads to an understanding of the “unreal” nature of the magician’s existence, since it is precisely within the confines of the circular ruins that the magician himself comes to discover that he too is immune to the effects of fire, and is, therefore, a “mero simulacro” and the “proyección del sueño de otro hombre” (OC 1: 454), to use the terms in which he describes the creature that he himself creates.

As mentioned earlier, the third of Lefebvre’s concepts, “representational spaces,” both supersedes and encompasses the earlier two, being “the dominated [...] space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate.” This is the realm of the interaction of power and space; as Soja puts it, “the spaces of representation teem with symbols” and are “vitaly filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined” (68). While we would obviously not equate the political projects of either Lefebvre or Soja with the type of concerns that Borges has in the composition of his *ficciones*, nevertheless the kind of transformational agenda that Lefebvre associates with spaces of representation is relevant to a story like “Las ruinas circulares.” After all, the structural and symbolic frame within which the story is set suggests that the magician is carrying out the ritualized performance of a transcendental act, the act of creating a man, and the setting is crucial to the success of that venture. The place chosen for this act is stated to be the appropriate place from the first paragraph of the story: “Sabía que ese templo era el lugar que requería su invencible propósito” (OC 1: 451). The temple is a space of representation, a setting that is already a sacred site when the magician reaches it, even if it has ceased to be used as such, having been consumed in flames. There are continual references in the story to the gods that inhabit—or that have inhabited—the place. Special reference is made to the god of fire, who appears to the magician in one of his dreams in order to inform him that he is the god depicted in the statue located in the centre of the ruined site. Everything in the story suggests that achieving his goal requires that the magician should come to this place, and that it is only within the context of this particular space that he can access the power that he needs in order to carry out his task of creation.

On the other hand, the notion of his ultimate failure, the eventual discovery of his own insubstantial nature, is also associated with the set-

ting where his dreaming takes place. This discovery comes about via his “son’s” actions in the other temple downstream, a temple that is referred to as early as the first paragraph, where we are told: “sabía que los árboles incesantes no habían logrado estrangular, río abajo, las ruinas de otro templo propicio, también de dioses incendiados y muertos” (OC 1: 451). We might note the use of the adjective “propicio,” with its connotations that suggest the place was appropriate or “fit for purpose.” Hence, the link between power—or lack of it—and place is again reinforced, in terms that emphasise the representational value of spatial locations.

Seeing the ruined temple as a “space of representation” in Lefebvre’s terms does not imply any reduction in the meaning of the story, which can be read on many levels. It is a story that is open to a wide range of interpretations,⁶ in many of which it is seen as a commentary on the act of artistic creation. The emphasis on the importance of spatiality in the story, however, serves to underline the key concept of “bringing something into existence,” regardless of whether we think of this as the creation of a type of “golem” or as bringing an artistic creation into being. Ultimately, the story is a commentary on issues of failure and success, knowledge and lack of knowledge, power and weakness, and the spatial theme in it contributes to that commentary by reinforcing the sense of a struggle between one man’s consciousness and the context of place in which he is located.

Lefebvre’s search for a “unitary theory” that would surpass the classical dichotomy between ideal and real space, between “conceptual thought” and “lived experience,”⁷ and that would manage to incorporate physical, mental and social conceptions of space, led him to suggest that what human beings do is “produce” space. This concept is posited on the idea that the human experience of space is always an experience of *social* space, and never that of space as something empty or space as a “container” for other things. As Smith puts it, in Lefebvre’s view, “space is in any meaningful sense produced in and through human activity and the reproduction of social relations” (quoted in Unwin 18). In Lefebvre’s own words, “(social) space is a (social) product” (26). And he continues: “every society—and

6 See Almeida; Bell-Villada 88; Boldy 87-90; Cañeque 228; Newman & Kinzie 59; Nuño 105; Soud, etc.

7 See Shields (9) on how this distinction in Lefebvre’s work can be traced back to the influence of Nietzsche and Spinoza.

hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept)—produces a space, its own space” (31). In Lefebvre’s case, there is an emphasis on the notion of “modes of production” and on the political ramifications of his theory. As a Marxist, he was concerned to advance an agenda of social change, and he saw his theoretical work as being intimately linked to political activities.

Borges, on the other hand, would have fled from the idea of connecting his own literary production with projects aimed at the transformation of society—even though, as is well known, he was not averse to acting with political intent from time to time in his home country (see Balderston; Williamson; Louis, etc.). However, the notion that there is a complex relationship between people and their spatial contexts is not foreign to Borges, and there is plenty of evidence for this in the stories. At times, the articulation of the nature of that relationship is couched in terms that are avowedly spatial and that draw attention to links between people and places, or people and territories. This is surely the case of those links between the detective’s lucubrations and the points on the map—corresponding to locations in space—in “La muerte y la brújula.” But it is also the case of the musings of Dahlmann, in “El Sur,” as we follow the trajectory of his journey from urban space to rural space and as we witness him crossing Rivadavia Street and entering into the “mundo más antiguo y más firme” (OC 1: 525) of the South. Here, we are told of the conflict in Dahlmann between his extensive “conocimiento nostálgico y literario” of the countryside, and his direct, tangible knowledge of it, which was “harto inferior” to the former (OC 1: 526).

Thus, characters’ inner struggles around questions of personal identity are explicitly connected to issues of location. The locations that are depicted in the stories are *social* spaces that are “socially produced,” a fact that protagonists in the stories often fail to appreciate fully. The result is a type of alienation, a sense of not being in one’s “proper place,” or of not knowing how to respond appropriately to the symbolic realities of the place that one is in. This is a useful framework within which to view Lönnrot’s errors, just as Dahlmann’s fatal mistake can be seen as the blunder he commits by allowing himself to be located in an alien bar, surrounded by people who *do* fit in and who are hostile to him as an outsider.

In a similar vein, we could interpret the meanings of locations that occur in stories such as “El Aleph” or “El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan.” In these stories, there are suggestions about the central importance of spatial location to an understanding of our “place” in the universe, while there is often an appreciation also of the relatively haphazard nature of location.

As stated earlier, there are plenty of important distinctions that need to be made between the worldviews of Lefebvre and Borges, differences that must not be ignored. What unites the two men, however, is, more than anything, a concern to resolve the dichotomy between living and thinking, an unsettling awareness of the limitations of intellectual activity and of the way in which such activity can cause us to feel estranged from our everyday self. For all the political content of his works, and for all the sophisticated theoretical reflection they contain, it is perhaps surprising that Lefebvre once asserted that all he had ever written about was love (Shields 7), or that “it is not technological progress, the absence of war, or ease of life, or even length of life, but the chance for a fully lived life that is the measure of a civilization” (quoted in Shields 2). It is likely that Borges would have been happy to echo those sentiments. For all the intellectual sophistication of *his* writings, he was still able to lament: “Yo, que tantos hombres he sido, no he sido nunca/ aquel en cuyo abrazo desfallecía Matilde Urbach” (OC 2: 230). Both men tended to emphasize the complexity inherent in all facets of the lived experience, and the inadequacy of language to express that experience. As with a whole range of other concepts, their—explicit, in the case of Lefebvre; more implicit in the case of Borges—interpretations of the relationship between human beings and spatiality are an ambitious attempt to encompass both the sensory and the conceptual, the physical and the symbolic.

Bill Richardson

National University of Ireland, Galway

WORKS CITED

- Almeida, Iván. "La circularidad de las ruinas: variaciones de Borges sobre un tema cartesiano". *Variaciones Borges*, 7 (1999): 66-87.
- Balderston, Daniel. *Out of context: historical reference and the representation of reality in Borges*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.
- Bell-Villada, Gene H. *Borges and his fiction*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1981.
- Boldy, Steven. *A companion to Jorge Luis Borges*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Obras completas*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1996.
- Cañeque, Carlos. *Conversaciones sobre Borges*. Barcelona: Destino, 1995.
- Duddy, Thomas. *A history of Irish thought*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Fernández Ferrer, Antonio. *Ficciones de Borges: en las galerías del laberinto*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2009.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 1974. (English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith: *The production of space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
- Louis, Annick. *Borges ante el fascismo*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Newman, Charles & Mary Kinzie (eds.). *Prose for Borges*. Evanston: Northwestern U P, 1974.
- Nuño, Juan. *La filosofía de Borges*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986.
- Roses, Joaquín, ed. *Borges y el Sur*. Córdoba: Diputación de Córdoba, 2004.
- Shields, Rob. *Lefebvre, Love & Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996.
- Soud, Stephen E. "Borges the golem-maker: intimations of 'presence' in 'The circular ruins.'" *MLN* 110 (1995): 739-54.

Unwin, T. "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, new series 25.1. (2000): 11-29.

Williamson, Edwin. *Borges, a life*. New York: Viking, 2004.