Of Structural Denial: A Narratological Study of the Structural Disintegration of the Novel Form

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Cover your heads, and mocke not fleſh and, blood
With ſolemne Reverence: throw away Reſpect,
Tradition, forme, and Ceremonious duty

William Shakespeare,
The Life and Death of King Richard the Second

I must Create a System. or be enslav'd by another Mans.

William Blake,
Jerusalem

No chronology will be observed here, nor is one necessary.

Milorad Pavić,
Dictionary of the Khazars

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I. Lavish Architectures: An Introduction

1. Prolegomena

If an opening to the argument of this dissertation is of imperative necessity, one might tentatively begin with Herbert Quain, born in Roscommon, Ireland, author of the novels *The God of the Labyrinth* (1933) and *April March* (1936), the short-story collection *Statements* (1939), and the play *The Secret Mirror* (undated). To a certain extent, this idiosyncratic Irish author, who hailed from the ancient province of Connacht, may be regarded as a forerunner of the type of novels which will be considered in this dissertation. Quain was, after all, the unconscious creator of one of the first *structurally disintegrated novels* in the history of western literature, *April March*. His first novel, *The God of the Labyrinth*, also exhibits elements which are characteristic of *structurally disintegrated fiction*, for it provides the reader with two possible solutions to a mysterious crime. As a matter of fact, one might suggest that Quain's debut novel offers the reader the possibility to ignore the solution to the crime and carry on living his or her readerly life, turning a blind eye to the novel itself. It may hence be argued that Quain's first novel is in fact a compound of three different novels.

It is self-evident that the structure of Quain's oeuvre is of an experimental nature, combining geometrical precision with authorial innovation, and one finds in it a higher consideration for formal defiance than for the text itself. In other words, the means of expression are the concern of the author and not, interestingly, the textual content. *April March*, for example, is a novel which regresses back into itself, its first chapter focussing on an evening which is preceded by three possible evenings which, in turn, are each preceded by three other, dissimilar, possible evenings. It is a novel of backward-movement, and it is due to this process of branching regression that *April March* contains within itself at least nine possible novels. Structure, therefore, paradoxically controls the text, for it allows the text to expand or contract under its formal limitations. In other words, the formal aspects of the novel, usually associated with the restrictive device of a superior design, contribute to a liberation of the novel's discourse. It is paradoxical only in the sense that the idea of structure necessarily entails the fixation of a narrative skeleton that determines how plot and discourse interact, something which Quain flouts for the purposes of innovation. In this sense, *April March*'s convoluted structure allows for multiple readings and interpretations of the same text, consciously germinating narratives within itself, producing different texts from a single, unique source. Thus, text and means of expression are bonded by a structural design that, rather than limiting, liberates the text of the novel.

Quain's preoccupation with the structural foundation of his novel as opposed to its plot makes manifest Quain's lack of interest in literary creation, for he is interested not in art itself, so much as the creation of a new idea of art, which may bestow on him a place in the annals of the history of literary thought. Indeed, in Quain's view, innovation precludes improvement. In his work, the novel form is challenged rather than consolidated. There is no quest for a conceptual cementation of the form, no pilgrimage for the establishment of a solid definition of 'the novel'. Instead, there is a continual obsession with formal progression, with excessive experimentation. The form subsists in the lack of a rooted formality. Like the novel itself, Quain is interested in literary evolution as opposed to literary consolidation.

These considerations on Herbert Quain would have been of seminal importance to this dissertation were it not for the fact that Herbert Quain did not write any of these books, nor was he ever more than a far-winged flight of fancy, conceived by the Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges.[1] The nature of this fact, of course, promptly dismisses most of these introductory reflections on the imagined works of H. Quain. It does not, however, invalidate the fact that Quain—or, as it were, Borges—did conceptualize what in this dissertation I define as *structural disintegration*. Herbert Quain's nihility should not deter one from considering his significance to the art of novel writing. There are several lessons to be learned from Quain's paradoxical inexistent existence. Firstly, one may concede that Quain's approach to 'the novel' evinces the long-standing allurement of the form and its potentialities. There is a recognition of the novel—that is, of any novel—as something that can be rewritten and redefined. Secondly, if it is true that *April March* was never more than an idea in a renowned short-story collection, the same cannot be said of its concept. Anticipated by Borges, the idea of a ramifying novel was later put into practice by authors like Italo Calvino—whose *If on a winter's night a traveller* will be considered in this dissertation not as a *structurally disintegrated novel* but as a herald of *generative fiction*—or Julio Cortázar—whose *Hopscotch* will be considered later in this dissertation—which only goes to prove that the idea of a narrative which is capable of generating other narratives, of treating literature like, as Calvino put it, "a combinatorial game" (Calvino, *Uses of Literature* 22) has been one of the defining elements in the construction of the novel form. Novels are based on other novels, standing on the shoulders of giants who, in turn, once stood on the shoulders of other giants, and so forth. The most significant lesson one might learn from Quain's nonexistence is that fiction has the power to generate itself,

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[1] See Borges, "A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain".

and that from one single, isolated narrative thousands of possible fictions may be deduced or imagined.[2]

2. The Burden of the Dissertation

Now that the idea of this dissertation has been introduced, it is time to make the acquaintance of its burden. "Of Structural Denial: A narratological study of the structural disintegration of the novel form" is an exploration of novels which, like Quain's, have disregarded fixed formal elements in exchange for an arbitrary disposition of structural design. In other words, the type of novels which I will peruse distinguishes itself by flouting conventional structural patterns, proffering the reader the capability to be the structural erector of the text. The process through which these novels accomplish this I shall call *structural disintegration*. The burden of this critical endeavour will be the assessment of these novels and the heterogeneous methods each uses to achieve this subversive effect: novels like Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1* (1962), for example, lack an inherent, even physical, structure, with unbound pages arbitrarily placed on top of each other inside of a box, whilst novels such as Adam Thirlwell's *Kapow!* (2012) give the illusion of a formal design but turn the reader's understanding of the form on its head by employing labyrinthine explorations of textual possibilities. Alongside this study of the formal aspects of this type of novels, I will also consider its significance, relevance, and consequential impact on the much-debated concept of 'the novel'. I will take into account whether this selective type of novels challenges the idea of the novel or whether it distinguishes itself by rejecting any conceptual association with the form. In other words, are these novels breaking the boundaries of the novel form or are they trying to distance themselves from it? One thing that should be acknowledged, when considering texts such as these, is that any novel which is *structurally disintegrated* can be read in multiple different ways. The consequences of these multiple readings will be assayed in the second chapter of this dissertation, which concerns itself solely with the *structural disintegration* phenomenon.

My methodological approach lies on a principle of deduction, since an exhaustive enumeration and analysis of *structurally disintegrated texts* would at once be utopian and, to be sure, redundant. What I present in this dissertation is a hypothesis of a poetics of *structural disintegration*, which introduces both a fictional plane capable of multiplying itself to a potential infinity and an

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[2] It is this self-sufficient characteristic of fiction, which is obviously not exclusive to novel writing, that I will later consider in the subsections of the second chapter dedicated to *generative fiction*.

alternative to the limitations of the novelistic conventional form (in particular to the realist genre, as we will later see). It is my wish in this study to neither be dogmatic or unscientific, for which reason this dissertation will conclude on a note that neither validates nor invalidates the theory it presents. It shall rather propose the consolidation and dissolution of itself. Theory, after all, is the logical structure of a possible design.

In the first chapter, which I have titled "On Structure", I will begin by assessing the concept of structure in novel writing, that is, how structural design serves an authorial purpose in the novel form. I will exercise a metaphor of the novel as a building. If the novel is a building, it follows that the novel's author is both its architect and erector. The structure, therefore, and consequently the author's 'structural purpose', is entirely dependent on the *original author* of the text. As we will verify in later chapters, that is not quite the case with *generative fiction*, a type of *structurally disintegrated novels*. Following these initial considerations, a definition of the concept *structural fixation* will be established, and we will see what principles this concept entails. I will define what is understood in this dissertation as *conventional novel* and *defiant conventional novel*, to better evince the differences between *structural fixation* and *structural disintegration*. Regarding what is defined as *conventional novel*, I will elaborate a list of criteria and examples that delineate the conventionality which is argued in the dissertation. In other words, I will identify what is conventional about the *conventional novel*. After this definition, I will explore the bond shared between form and content in *conventional novels*. That is to say, how does a fixed structure affect the novel form? Is 'structural purpose' a defining aspect of the novel?

Following this analysis of the *conventional novel*, I will consider novels which defy this conventionality but remain fixated to an authorial structural design. These novels I call *defiant conventional novels*. Regarding the *defiant conventional novel*, there are several novels which I will examine, though only summarily. A few of these novels are James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), and Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Parts* (1981). These examples, albeit relevant to the present discussion, were chosen for the value of their literary effect rather than for their impact in the literary tradition, as the objective of this dissertation is not to review the (canonical) evolution of the *defiant conventional novel* but rather to describe how its defiance of the *conventional novel*, when juxtaposed with *structural disintegration*, is in fact closer to convention and tradition than to the more acute defiance of structural order employed in *structurally disintegrated fiction*. That is to say, since the author of a *defiant conventional novel* does not move away from the *structural fixation* of the narrative, it is rather hard for the *defiant conventional novel* to wholly flout said conventionality. To better understand this, I will succinctly examine the structural choices

employed by several authors of *defiant conventional novels* to verify how their attempt to 'defixate' the structural design of the text is a failed one, within the broader *structural fixation* of the text. I will demonstrate how, despite subverting authorial devices to manifest their confrontation of the modality of the *conventional novel*, these novels remain unwaveringly fixated within a structural design, generating a formal and textual tension that is made manifest by the apparent difficulty of some of the texts in question.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, titled "Against Structure", which, owing to the nature of this dissertation, will be far more extensive and thorough in its analysis, I will briefly review the concept of *structural fixation*, so as to compare it to its antithetical concept, *structural disintegration*. A definition of the latter term will follow this brief review. I shall then introduce the concept *generative fiction*, establishing its principles and defining its purpose. Two key concepts for the understanding of *generative fiction* will be further presented: the concepts of *original author* and of *other author*, which characterize the dialectic author/reader in this type of *structurally disintegrated fiction*.

This will be followed by a consideration of four novels which act as forerunners of *structural disintegration*, bearing in mind the fact that some of them, such as Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979), were published after key *structurally disintegrated texts* had already been published, such as Saporta's *Composition No.1* or B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969). These four novels are Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1949), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual* (1978), and the aforementioned Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*. They will be regarded as precursors of *generative fiction*, ergo *pre-generative*, that is, texts which precede, or that blazon but do not perform, the *structurally disintegrated* state exhibited by *generative fiction*. [3]

Following this discussion of *pre-generative fiction*, I will proceed to explore the first type of *structurally disintegrated novels*, which I have named *generative fiction*. I will consider several novels which, linked to the idea of a fiction which generates other fictions, make use of the subversive form of *structural disintegration* to explore, or break, the boundaries of the novel form, storytelling, and the text itself. The novels which will be taken into account are Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1* (1962), Edouard Levé's *Works* (2002), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969), Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984), *Landscape Painted with Tea* (1988), and *Last Love in Constantinople* (1994), Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), Adam Thirlwell's *Kapow!*

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[3] For an explanation of this peculiar terminology, see the subsection "An Overview of *Pre-Generative fiction*" in the second chapter of this dissertation, "Against Structure".

(2012), and J. J. Abrams and Doug Dorst's *S.* (2013), novels here presented according to the structure of the dissertation, as opposed to a chronological logic.

The following step in this journey through *structural disintegration* is the introduction and interpretation of the other type of *structurally disintegrated novel*, the *idiorealist novel*. In this subsection of the dissertation, I shall elaborate a definition of *idiorealist fiction* and establish its relationship to its parent term, realism. I will examine also the idea of *mimesis*, which is inherently attached to the idea of *idiorealism*. The concept will be analysed in the light of a tradition of novelistic experimentation that ventures to mimetically represent reality in the novel form. It will be ascertained that *idiorealist fiction* makes use of the disintegrated nature of *structural disintegration* to propose an idea of reality as arbitrary and lacking a structural design. Two novels will be considered for this effect: B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969) and Chris Ware's *Building Stories* (2012).

The conclusion to this dissertation, which I have titled "Becoming Irrelevant", initiates with an expatiation on what may be termed the dance of literary entropy. Since it is this author's wish not to extend this dissertation beyond the acceptable limits of textual and dissertational extension, this opening section of the conclusion will merely introduce, rather than copiously expound, the idea of a resilient novel form.[4] I shall consider the postmodern move from *structural fixation* to *structural disintegration*, observing how the shift of power from author to reader and the dismissal of 'structural purpose' contribute toward a discernible understanding of the significance of *structural disintegration* to the novel form. I will posit a hypothesis, regarding the fate of the novel, based on an empirical comprehension of the history of the genre—influenced, in particular, by the theory of the novel developed by scholars such as Steven Moore and Mikhail Bakhtin. The general principle of this theory is the following: the novel, which was fuelled from its conception by a liberating approach to textual narrative, was from the eighteenth-century fixated to a set of rules and principles, that were then stripped and removed by constant formal and diegetic experimentation, until its structural design was, at last, in the postmodern era, disintegrated. From the structural order of its incipience, the novel progressively gave rise to an entropic textual and formal condition that simultaneously hampers any possibility of the novel form either dying out or stalling within a labyrinth of repetitive formal construction. In other words, I will assess how the novel is a literary form that demands liberation and that depends on continuous metamorphosis, be it of form or content, to resist and not perish.

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[4] For the same reason, albeit applied in this case to the present introduction, a full disclosure of the contents of this conclusive chapter will be offered only when opportune (that is, in the conclusion itself).

3. A Refutation of Ergodic Literature

In a book published in 1995, titled *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, the Norwegian scholar Espen J. Aarseth developed a theory of the cybertext which defined some of the novels I discuss in this dissertation as 'ergodic'. Aarseth's purpose was to produce a unified theory of cybertext that would conglomerate physical and electronic texts. It would thus silence the academic voices that separated both on, according to Aarseth, purely material or historical levels (Aarseth 17-18).

In this dissertation, I purposely chose to, as it were, turn a blind eye to Aarseth's theory, not out of disrespect for an obviously well-researched and learned study of cybertextual narratives, but because the 'ergodic' nature he describes as related to novels like Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* is better suited for a narrative that is not linked to what one might call a 'traditional physicality'. Novels like Cortázar's depend on an awareness of the traditional principles of the novel form (which we will consider in the first chapter of this dissertation), not to speak of the conception of the physical text as something which can be moulded and adapted by the reader. Indeed, just as the concept 'ergodic' characterizes the process of reading as a labyrinthine and open-ended immersion in the text, giving the reader an interventional role in the creation of the work, so does it fail to acknowledge the significance of the 'traditional physicality' on some of the texts he defines as 'ergodic'—either to the form of the novel or to the broader world of literature. In other words, to merely describe, for example, the reading of Milorad Pavić's *Landscape Painted with Tea* as labyrinthine and the reader as a path-making intervener, is erroneous at best. The reader does not enter a labyrinth as much as s/he builds one with the materials provided by the author: in Pavić's case, this helps preserve the novelty of the work, for multiple labyrinths may spring from a single source. And while 'ergodic' is defined as involving "nontrivial effort" (Aarseth 1), and while Aarseth recognizes that multiple texts and readings are created by literature which indulges in this form, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation as to what these novels actually accomplish on their own. In sum, 'ergodic' is limited to the produced effect of the cybertext, and dismisses the implications which are inherently attached to it. Further, Aarseth ignores that the "functional differences" (15) between physical and electronic texts are, in fact, the elements which bestow on these texts their fundamental nature. In other words, the physical text depends on its physicality to challenge the reader's idea of the novel form. The electronic text, on the other hand, depends on its incorporeal existence to initiate a new process of reading: that is to say, it demands new vocabulary to interpret its functionality. It is to these texts only—and not to physical texts—that the term 'ergodic' is better suited.

To render the difference between my own work and Aarseth's on a metaphorical level, Aarseth deals with shapes, whilst my work is preoccupied with forms, planes, and the things in between. Admittedly, the reader as creator of fiction, who dares to go beyond the text, whose image of the literary and the process of literary creation is subverted, is something that is touched upon by Aarseth. Yet, it remains, for the most of it, unexplored. This particular fact is not to be mistaken for a flaw in Aarseth's theory, since it has more to do with his desire to converge two distinct forms of textual narrative—which, in my opinion, are attached to two different systems of narratological creation/reception—into a unified theory. Even considering Aarseth's reviewal of what is a physical text and an electronic text, the theory still fails to recognize, for example, Johnson's *Unfortunates* as a text that, rather than being 'ergodic', wants to be uncompromisingly realist. Furthermore, Aarseth's unified theory is unassumingly superficial when applied to physical texts such as Johnson's: it relies only on the fact that the reader intervenes in the construction of the text. It describes process but not purpose or effect.

The latent function of *structurally disintegrated texts* is to destabilize the reading of conventional texts: there is a quest for 'defixation' of structural patterns. Therein lies the strongest critique I have to make of Aarseth's ergodic theory: the difference between physical and electronic texts lies precisely on their functionality. Even if on a theoretical level there is a shared "principle of calculated production" (Aarseth 5), this principle does not account for the conscious effect of *structurally disintegrated novels* on conventional fiction, and their sense of a novelistic tradition. While texts like Saporta's *Composition No.1* try to reinvigorate, challenge, reconstruct the novel form, electronic texts are, of necessity, inaugurating different textualities, even if based on, to be sure, traditional ones. The two may intersect, of course, but to mistake one for the other would be a theoretical mistake. After all, if one seeks to destabilize convention, the other seeks to create said convention. They are, in this sense, antithetical.

I must assume that there is a certain theoretical gamble in negotiating Aarseth's terms in such a lukewarm manner, together with the fact that my own theories of the novels he names 'ergodic' present a challenging viewpoint which is more adequately inscribed in the tradition of the novel form than in the electronic realm. Yet, it is my foremost intention to apply traditional literary conventions and methods of analysis to *structural disintegration*, which is unconventional only in relation to the overall conventionality of the form. In this way, I hope to prove how *structurally disintegrated novels* depend on *structurally fixated novels* not only to manifest their divergent interpretation of the novel but also to subvert the fixation of fiction into predetermined patterns, and thus recreate all texts and rewrite all possible fictions. It would not be possible to do this were

I to submit to Aarseth's theory, who sees these texts more as prototypical and symptomatic, than as part of a novelistic tradition that is still to fade into inexistence.

Fortunately, theories of structure and form, while not interdependent or intersectional, can coexist in dissonance, not necessarily denying or confirming each other's propositions. As Aarseth himself acknowledges in the conclusion to his book, one may choose to "ignore" (Aarseth 183) his neologistic terms and choose a different path of interpretation of this type of novels. An attitude which, ironically, evinces an ergodic tint.

4. On Hypertext Fiction

I chose to exclude hypertext fiction from this discussion of *structural fixation* and *structural disintegration*, for these electronic texts, albeit of necessity considered 'novels', are already beyond what one may consider tangibility. Their form is, even if only in nature, dependent on the reader's active construction. That is, there are no bound pages, no physical limitations. It is a theoretical infinity. That is not to say, however, that hypertext fiction cannot be considered *structurally disintegrated fiction*, but one should take into account the fact that the presentation of these texts already evinces a *structural disintegration* that is unquestionably impossible to fixate, unless it regresses to a physical, as opposed to digital, condition. A different typology could, theoretically, be elaborated for hypertext fiction, yet, for reasons of brevity, I will limit my study to those works that have been published in physical format and that are dependent on the reader's conception of the novel as a purely physical text. This does not preclude the existence, in some of these texts, of an attraction to hypertextual reality. The London-based publisher Visual Editions' modern edition of Saporta's *Composition No.1*, for example, published the novel in both physical and e-book format, further challenging any preconceptions that the reader might transport to the reading of the novel.[5]

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[5] Curiously, this edition of Saporta's *Composition No.1* includes an "Anatomy of Your Favourite Novel" conceived by Salvador Plascencia, who also designed the diagrams which adorn the back side of the novel's loose sheets and the box in which these are included. In this "Anatomy", which has a dirge-like quality to it, with its thorough explanation and schematization of a familiar object, Plascencia presents the reader with sketches of four prototypical novels, one showing a book's cover, the other showing its back, another with an open book and, finally, one showing a book which possesses a right-to-left orientation (Saporta n. p.). Plascencia's text, however, serving as it does as an introduction to *Composition No.1*, presents a version of the novel which is not compatible with Saporta's text. It suggests, instead, the faint outline of an idea of the novel which, after Saporta's text, and I daresay after the advent of *structural disintegration*, was slowly deconstructed. To the novice being introduced for the first time to Marc Saporta's work, this "Anatomy", as a historical document, preserves an image of the past that has been denied, a fragment of a time that would forever become unattainable, a lament for an idea of the novel that died when Saporta published his *Composition* in 1962.

5. A Note on Texts in Translation

I have chosen to rely on French, Italian, Spanish, and Serbian texts in English translation for the purposes of coherence and unity. It was my foremost preoccupation that the text should not read like a babelish congregation of languages and that the wide variety of literatures gathered here should not affect the intelligibility of the argument being proposed. Further, since the purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the formal elements of the novel form, there is no substantial need for some of the texts used to be in the original, rather than in translation. Even so, I have made an effort to select, where possible, the best translations in the English language, and it is my hope that they affect neither the accessibility nor the comprehension of my arguments.

II. On Structure
1. The Novel and The Building

Perhaps one ought to begin with an anacrustic simile: a novel is a *mausoleum*. Once inside this silent tomb, a dauntless reader may only guess at the nature of the body that lies within its cavernous depths, fumbling through torchless, labyrinthian corridors that bend and fold into endless recesses, left without hope of ever uncovering the vast extent of its secrets. Despite the word's etymological root (it derives from the Latin *novella*, or 'new thing'), the novel is often regarded as an immutable literary form.[6] Even if one concedes that some novels—generally seen as exceptions to the rule—indulge in nonlinearity and unconventionality in their formal construction, structure itself is nonetheless fixed to a particular number of formal assumptions and principles that formulate that which we commonly understand as 'conventionality'. Indeed, as the texts examined in this dissertation prove, most novels are subjected to a fixed structure, being conceived by an author and presented to a reader. Considering that the analysis of the novel form in this dissertation will be circumscribed to the appearance, structure, and form of the novel, it is not out of place to suggest a metaphor that may adequately produce an overview of the topics examined in our discussion.

A novel is a methodic construction, whose foundations are carefully laid by its creator—the author—and whose form and content are interpreted by those who peruse it—the readers. It is certainly not unfathomable, then, to regard the novel as one regards a building. Let us consider, for a brief paragraph, a hypothetical building's form and structure, its shape and presentation. The building's physical appearance, if barren and small, may not disclose to the inquisitive passer-by

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[6] It is important to note here the literary 'rift' argued by the renowned French literary critic, Roland Barthes, in *S/Z* (1970), an extensive analysis of Honoré de Balzac's short-story "Sarrasine". In his book, Barthes proposes a categorial distinction between what he terms 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts. The former category nears the idea of 'immutable form' that I allude to in this passage, referring to texts which are "*tonal* text[s]" (Barthes, S/Z 30) and that "make up the enormous mass of our literature" (5), while the latter category encompasses the vast majority of novels discussed in this dissertation, that is, texts which demand the reader's engagement—to wit, "the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure" (5). As mentioned, it is Barthes's idea of a 'readerly' text, of a novel which demands no effort from the reader—who is limited to a basic perusal of the text—that I refer to as *conventional*, the linear, derivative text. 'Writerly' texts, on the other hand, are often seen as variations or singular experiments. The Barthesian concept is debatable, of course, seeing that it is often dependent on the interpretation, and not execution, of the text: a text might be simultaneously readerly or writerly, or concomitantly both, as Richard Howard suggests (Howard ix; see also Moore, 20 for further comments on the writerly/readerly question). Further in this chapter, to unearth this invisible thread that binds the 'writerly' and the 'readerly', I will deconstruct the idea of *conventional novel* and argue for a metamorphic nature of what is understood as 'convention' and 'tradition', using Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* as an example of this nomenclatural transformation.

the potential comfort of the quarters established beneath its ill-thatched roof. An exuberant, grandiose aesthetic, on the other hand, might conceal the emptiness of that which lies in between its walls, easily unmasked were this inquisitive passer-by to cross its auriferous threshold. Its form, therefore, is not diametrically related to its content. If we venture further into this metaphorical exercise, we may suppose the building to be richly endowed with skilful ornaments, bearing classical embellishments as evocative as a dozen lateral-sited towering Tuscan pilasters making way for a frontispiece which is shadowed by a decastyle portico girdled with a faint odour of gold, in turn shaded by a facade layered with cornucopian stained glass glossed with a variety of colours. Its entrails, however, might only bear the bare qualities that allow for the definition of a building, bordering an empty space devoid of meaning. It may also fall short of the inherent beauty one usually associates with the familiar solace of one's own home. It might, albeit only occasionally, appear in a most heterodox fashion: lozenge-shaped, windowless, doorless, colourless, perhaps even roofless, subscribed to a systematic deconstruction of its parts induced by a rebellion against established concepts. It might present a conscious denial of the common understanding of the concept of 'building'. Notwithstanding, a building remains a building, even if a poorly cemented, aesthetically oblivious, structurally unpleasant one. It may founder under its own weight or crumble under its pretentious claims to originality, but the fact remains that the idea of 'it' as a building is unencumbered by these practicalities.

The metaphor of the novel as 'building' is not therefore entirely without reason. The novel as structure may better elucidate the analogy. The etymological origin of the word *structure* is found in the Latin word *structura*, which finds its English equivalent in the words *building* or *edifice*. *Structura* itself derives from the past participle of the verb *struere* (*structus*), to which the English equivalent would be *to assemble*, *to join together* (*OED*, "structure, *n*."). Throughout the history of the novel, literary structure has been, to some extent, a fixed contrivance, an established framework carefully put together by the novel's author. The Anglo-American New Critics, for example, assumed this conception of the literary work: according to the theoretical school's tenets, the symbols, metaphors, and tropes of a text are all interrelated, forming a web of signifiers which is encompassed by the structure of the work. Indeed, more often than not, a novel's consistency depends on the validity—even supposing the presence of ambiguity and paradox—of the interrelation of its signifiers. To return to the metaphor of the building, the author is the architect

and brick-maker that devises and erects these webs of signifiers, which, even if arbitrary and incongruous, are the 'composites'[7] of a structure. This idea of the novel I shall call *structural fixation*.

The concept of *structural fixation* implies a novelistic structure that is restricted by authorial control, that is, a structure that is planned and architected by the novel's author and to which the reader is inherently subjugated. In other words, if the novel has a fixed structure, being dependent on *structural fixation*, then, to use our early metaphor, this kind of novel is a building in whose construction the reader does not participate. The consequences of this *structural fixation* to literary theory are openly exposed by the importance which is attributed by the author to the structural design of the novel. That is to say, if a novel possesses a carefully designed structure and well-defined formal aspects, and if these are found to be the foundation of the text's meaning, then any hermeneutic exercise, indeed any theoretical expedition which seeks to interpret the text, inflected upon the novel should, in theory, take into account the author's 'structural purpose'. This 'structural purpose' bears certain implications in the reading and interpretation of a text. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), an example of a novel which begins, to use Horatio's term, *ab ovo*, is indissociable from the tradition of *Bildungsroman*, a tradition that is arguably associated with intellectual growth, with maturity, and, therefore, with a beginning that impetuously moves towards an ending.[8] In this system of *structural fixation*, the reader acts only as the receiver and interpreter of the novel: the structure is part of the author's planning and is, therefore, the representation of a meaning.

The novel is hence verbal and textual architecture. It is a literary form that conglomerates the vitality of the artistic spirit and the rational vivisection of the scientific realm, combining the mathematical scrupulousness of the design of its parts with the spontaneous fluidity of the objects of its nature. Theory has not dismissed this characteristic of the form. Referring to the novel's capacity to conglomerate into a whole a sum of the most variegated parts, the Marxist critic Terry Eagleton writes, "[the novel] is the most hybrid of literary forms, a space in which different voices, idioms, and belief-systems continuously collide" (Eagleton, *English Novel* 5-6), a view similar to Bakhtin's, whom he goes on to mention in a later paragraph: "Bakhtin is surely right to see the novel as emerging from the stream of culture dripping with the shards and fragments of other

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[7] The meaning of the term 'composite' used in this passage refers to an old, now obsolete acceptation, whose modern equivalent would be 'component'. The latter term was precluded by the former, however, in keeping with the style of the author.

[8] In his book on the *Bildungsroman* genre, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, Franco Moretti observes that, in England, the genre is no more than "one long fairy-tale with a happy ending, far more elementary and limited than its continental counterparts" (Moretti 213), a remark evidently informed by the conventionality of the genre, in particular its structural backbone, similar, as noted, to the structure of a fairy-tale.

forms" (6). For Eagleton, the apex of the novel form has already been left behind, having taken place in the first half of the twentieth century, and stands now as a figurative beacon, enlightening the path of the many offspring it produced. Thus, he declares, in a sombre, dirgeful tone, "The great European novel of the early twentieth century - Proust, Mann, Musil - was able to weave together myth and history, psychological insight and social commentary, ethics and politics, satire and spirituality, comedy and tragedy, realist narrative and a fantasia of the unconscious" (336). Yet the pervading sentiment in Eagleton's theoretical thought is that of a novel which in its mutable garment, is forever changing faces and altering its literary countenance.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Steven Moore, one of the leading authorities on William Gaddis, comments on the novel's affiliation with innovation, difficulty, and erudite vigour, calling it "a delivery system for aesthetic bliss" (Moore, *Beginnings* 15). Moore further notes that novels which do battle with tradition are responsible for the sustenance of the form, and in an exhortation executed in the exordium of his voluminous study of the novel, he writes:

> Give me fat novels stuffed with learning and rare words, lashed with purple prose and black humor; novels patterned after myths, the Tarot, the Stations of the Cross, a chessboard, a dictionary, an almanac, the genetic code, a game of golf, a night at the movies; novels with unusual layouts, paginated backward, or with sentences running off the edges, or printed in different colors, a novel on yellow paper, a wordless novel in woodcuts, a novel in first chapters, a novel in the form of an anthology, Internet postings, or an auction catalog; huge novels that occupy a single day, slim novels that cover a lifetime; novels with footnotes, appendices, bibliographies, star charts, fold-out maps, or with a reading comprehension test or Q&A supplement at the end; novels peppered with songs, poems, lists, excommunications; novels whose chapters can be read in different sequences, or that have 150 possible endings; novels that are all dialogue, all footnotes, all contributors' notes, or one long paragraph; novels that begin and end midsentence, novels in fragments, novels with stories within stories; towers of babble, slang, shoptalk, technical terms, sweet nothings; give me many-layered novels that erect a great wall of words for protection against the demons of delusion and irrationality at loose in the world. (Moore, *Beginnings* 19)

The astute reader will find that many of the novels hinted at in this inspired invocation are to be found enclosed, if not in the entirety of its parts, at least in partiality and in subtle reference, within the walls of this dissertation.

Yet, to move on from extraneous theoretical perspectives, let us trace our steps back to the footpath of structural analogy. In the light of the aforementioned revelatory architectural metaphor, a question may now arise from the vaults of conceptual definition: what is structure? To put it in simple terms, structure is the anatomy of text. As the bedrock of a novel, the idea of structure implies adherence to a set number of principles which guide the novel's discourse from the author to the reader. Structural design follows the pattern of the novel's ideology, that is to say, it is the performance of the discourse and an exhibition of the text's 'purpose' and 'theme'. Structure, therefore, is the arrangement and configuration of a novel's elements that conveys the novel's meaning on an 'anatomical' textual sense. The absence of structure and, in turn, of a structural design (apart from a superficial and obvious allusion to disorder and chaos) renders the work of art—the novel—plastic in its meaning and, furthermore, erases the limitative barriers which are imposed by the author when the work is bound to a 'structural purpose'. It is the denial of authority and, concomitantly, the affirmation of the reader's puissance. It cannot, however, perform this action without a tradition of structural enforcement, so it is dependent, in this sense, on the validation of structure to execute its structural renunciation.

The subject of this chapter, as indicated by its title and the preceding remarks, is structure and the conventional structural presentation of the novel form. I will propose that *structural fixation* is characteristic of *conventional novels* and *defiant conventional novels*. Later in the chapter, I shall review the principles and implications of each of these structural concepts—counterposed by *structural disintegration*, which subverts the principles of structural design and structural purpose. For purposes of clarity, at this introductory point in the chapter, it is better to provide an example of what is meant by *structurally fixated fiction*, in particular of a *conventional novel*. If a hypothetical novel, written by a hypothetical author, were to open with Chapter A, and were this Chapter A to be followed by Chapters B, C, and D, and were this novel to conclude with Chapter Z, acting in accordance to an internal chronology, then this novel, regardless of its (low-keyed) diegetic or linguistic experimentation, would be interpreted in this dissertation as a *conventional, structurally fixated novel*. This fact would be attributable to the reader's perception of the literary work as 'fixated' to a principle of authorial continuity. That is to say, the hypothetical reader, faced with a novel which

has a clear structural design and which generally exercises chronological diligence, can theoretically unearth, with precision, a structural skeleton, from its head to its tail.

2.   The Conventional Novel

Conventionality is a substantious word. Of the whole and varied extent of the English lexicon, it is arguably a word which, if particularly applied to the novel form, conceals a strong conflict of opposition beneath the innocent cloth of its syllabic agglomeration. It bears certain implications that lead into complex and theoretical mazes from which one may never find the way out. Firstly, what is a *conventional novel*? It is implied in the word 'conventional' (in the context presently being discussed) that there are elements shared between novels which allow the novel form to be formally acknowledged, hence following a determinate number of common principles. Dramatic and poetic texts, for example, as has been noted, can be easily recognized by their formal presentation. In theory, then, the novel form can be just as patently identified.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals to the curious inquirer that the word 'conventional', applied to art in general, means the following: "*Art.* Consisting in, or resulting from, an artificial treatment of natural objects; following accepted models or traditions instead of directly imitating nature or working out original ideas" (*OED*, "conventional, *adj.* and *n.*"). In this sense, the novel form, if displaying 'conventionality', follows a tradition of form and structure, abiding by rules that make possible the identification of the novel as distinct from the poem, the treatise, or the dramatic piece. And yet, if there is such a concept as that of a 'conventional' novel, then its conceptual opposition has, of necessity, to be implicitly present in the term itself. That is to say, if there are *conventional novels*, if the novel form complies with a structural design that makes possible a systematic, conceptual definition of its parts, then a counterposing 'unconventionality' ought to be also in existence. To name a category is to define already its conceptual opposition, since the existence of concept A implies concept B. A deviation from the established form of the novel, therefore, is already implicit in the nature of the form itself. It follows that what is bound into a fixed category may soon spawn shapes which reject previously established definitions. Such behaviour allows for a continuous revision of both the concept of novel or of any assumptions of literary genre.[9] Hence, *conventional novels*, prescribed to the shrine of tradition, inadvertently give rise

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[9] It is worth to mention here, as an example, the metamorphic nature of literary genres (see Jacques Derrida's "The Law of Genre").

to unconventional novels, which make use of said tradition to subvert it and to suggest its capitulation. In this dissertation, however, novels which would elsewhere be regarded as unconventional—viz. James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, to name a few— in the light of *structural disintegration*, are considered *defiant conventional novels*. To put it another way, their 'unconventionality' is counteracted, on a structural level, by the unconventional formal nature of *structurally disintegrated fiction*. We shall explore this in depth in the next subchapter.

As evinced by the former statements, the concept of 'conventionality' in this dissertation will be considered solely on structural terms, even if, admittedly, it is necessary to take into consideration the unfeasible task of severing the bond between form and content. Consequently, I will limit myself to a punctilious delineation of the main principles of each concept, and to an exemplification of what is meant by each of the defined terms, without necessarily disregarding any possible 'structural purpose' conceived by an author. One need only peer at the debate surrounding the concept of 'novel', to ascertain that the game of definitions is a dangerous game to play. For this reason, the considerations I have drawn regarding 'conventionality' and the novel form are meant to be applicable chiefly within the context of this dissertation. They are intended to be neither authoritative nor dogmatic, and are instead hypotheses that help trace the phenomenon of *structural disintegration* and its effects with more precision. Without doubt, questions will immediately arise after browsing through the history of the novel while bearing these concepts in mind. Where would one include the novels of Henry James, for example? Or, for that matter, Virginia Woolf? Do these authors follow tradition or do they sever their ties with it? Do their novels narrate a single story or, instead, one story out of many possible stories? Would they be regarded as a hybrid species of a doubled genus, concomitantly *conventional* and *defiant conventional novels*? Mark, for instance, Alain Robbe-Grillet's thoughts on the initial fate of embryonic forms of any artistic medium. He notes, "A new form will always seem more or less an absence of any form at all, since it is unconsciously judged by reference to the consecrated forms" (Robbe-Grillet 468). For that reason, the concept of *conventional*, detached from any specific frame of reference (as in the case of this dissertation), soon evinces its mutable conceptual contours, for to crystalize a concept that is unchangeable is to fasten and secure its obsolescence.

There are three ruling principles in a *conventional novel*, as defined in the context of this dissertation, which shall be enumerated at once. First and foremost, as we have already seen, the *conventional novel* is dedicated to tradition. It exhibits a preoccupation with traditional novel writing, with pre-established rules and conventions, and it generally follows a linear skeletal structural

planning. In doing so, the *conventional novel* promotes the unity and continuity of the form. Its sense of progress implies respect for custom and convention and, on a structural level, affinity with established forms. The *conventional novel* understands the sense of the novel's history.

Secondly, a *conventional novel* eschews the use of formal experimentalism. Its chief objective is to subscribe to an orthodox novelistic structural design. That being so, the author's 'structural purpose' is hence inherently related to a past tradition. The author manipulates the novel's structural design to serve a specific purpose. In the case of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, as previously mentioned, the *ab ovo* structure of the novel is mirrored by its subscription to the *Bildungsroman* genre. As such, contrary to *defiant conventional novels*, the *conventional novel* does not make use of an experimental structural design, for to do so would be to negate its association to tradition and history. It would pose an impediment to the historical continuity of the form.

Lastly, the third principle of a *conventional novel* is the principle of storytelling. In other words, a *conventional novel* is a novel which has a defined plot, a determinate number of characters that interact with each other, and events which are narrated either by a first or third-person narrator, customarily in chronological order. These three principles—bond with tradition; rejection of experimental techniques; well-defined storytelling—are the characteristics of the *conventional novel* that set it apart from the *defiant conventional novel.* As we will see, the latter impetuously counteracts and flouts these three principles.

An example of a *conventional novel* is now in order, so as to make explicit what is meant by its proposed definition. Regard *The Baron in the Trees* (1957), a novel written by the Italian author Italo Calvino, who, incidentally, also wrote one of the four novels considered in this dissertation as *pre-generative.* The novel narrates, in the course of its 30 chapters, the story of Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò, as told by his brother, Biagio Piovasco di Rondò, beginning with his negation of life among civilization and Man, and subsequent decision to live the remaining years of his life on trees, and concluding with his ascension, on an air balloon, to the cosmic mouth of the Ombrosian sky. The novel complies with the criteria of a *conventional novel* as defined in the context of this dissertation, for it possesses a traditional linear design, which discloses a story, and it avails itself of little experimentalism. On a structural plane, it is evidently conventional.

Howbeit, perspectives on form are forever shifting shape. Thus, certain novels, which at the time of their publication were considered unconventional, gradually came to be regarded as conventional. Their once abnormal configuration lost its innovative power, in consequence of the standardization of its structural variation. Let us consider, for example, Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, a novel first published in *Household Words* between 1852 and 1853. This Dickensian novel,

widely regarded as one of Dickens's greatest achievements, may clarify any residual doubts as to what is meant in this dissertation by the term *conventional novel*. On the structural dimension of the novel, the critic Stephen Gill wrote, "[*Bleak House*'s] highly unusual narrative structure in itself constantly and insistently foregrounds interpretative activity" (Gill xvi). Still, despite the novel's apparently uncommon structural complexity, the three principles identified in the previous paragraphs are manifested here. While once the novel's structure might have been thought of as atypical, in this dissertation it is identified as *conventional*. The principle of structural tradition is the most glaringly present one. The novel is, first of all, divided into numbered and named chapters, owing to its publication in monthly instalments. It is structured with a straightforward, linear 'beginning-middle-and-end' configuration, where a story is told, narrated both by the novel's 'heroine', Esther Summerson, in the first person, and by a third-person omniscient narrator, who narrates the story in the present tense. What little experimentalism there may be, it does not affect the novel form in a way that defies conventionality as it is understood in this dissertation. Its experimental qualities lie timidly elsewhere, in diegetic and linguistic strata. If compared with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), to which we shall return after a brief paragraphical interjection, *Bleak House*'s structure is both modest and reserved, even if one accounts for the two narrative voices inlaid within it. One recalls the above-quoted words of Robbe-Grillet.

We arrive here at a crucial crossroads in this journey through *structural fixation*, at a point which might help one to differentiate the *conventional novel* from the *defiant conventional novel*. The heart of the matter presently at hand is the marriage of form and content in the novel. Given the fact that form is the foundation of the building, carrying on its shoulders the infrastructure of the project, and that other elements which are allocated and attributed to it are elements which give the building its individuality and its 'sense-of-being', it follows that there exists a mutual correspondence between the former and the latter. That is, that in the novel form, form and content depend on each other's consonance to produce a coherent internal logic. One may interpret it in the following manner: if the content of a novel could not exist outside of the form within which it is exercised without loss of meaning, so would the form of the novel be a vapid, lifeless ruin without the elements which bestow on it its individual nature. Thus, form and content cannot but overlap and intersect each other's paths. Structural design is an integral part of the diegesis of a novel, being the foundation on which the content of the novel is settled. Hence, the *conventional novel* often (although not always) conforms to a conventional, linear discourse, and the *defiant conventional novel* hews to less traditional, more transgressive discourses, designed to emulate the structure within which it works.

Now let the reader consider a novel which stands in between the margins of an imagined border. In the conceptual context we are presently discussing, and taking into account the conclusions we have drawn so far, James Joyce's second novel, *Ulysses*, should theoretically suggest a *conventional* form seeing that, on the level of content, the novel adheres to an apparently traditional skeleton, telling the (fallaciously) linear story of a day in the life of ordinary Leopold Bloom and despondent Stephen Daedalus. If one were to consider, in fact, the novel's open alliance with the Homeric poem to which it pays homage, then the principle of tradition and the principle of storytelling would be more than confirmed. Yet, one should not ignore the fact that *Ulysses'* linguistic and diegetic experimentalism directly influence the novel's structural design. *Ulysses* suingly stands in between two worlds, the classical age and the modern age of incalculable possibility. Just as antiquity merges with modernity, so too is the *conventional* faced with the *defiant* in the lines of Joyce's *magnum opus*. *Ulysses* conglomerates the fervour of spontaneity and verbal radicalism with the restrictive, yet confirming, lushness of the forms of the past, indicating, not only on a structural level, how an author is concomitantly indebted to his or her innovative spirit as to the authoritative voices of those others who came before. As Robbe-Grillet suggests, "The writer himself, despite his desire for independence, is situated within an intellectual culture and a literature which can only be those of the past. It is impossible for him to escape altogether from this tradition of which he is the product" (Robbe-Grillet 468).

An anecdote: *Ulysses* was acrimoniously called by the Marxist Karl Radek, "a dung-heap swarming with worms, photographed by a movie-camera through a microscope" (qtd. in Kiberd xvii), a curious view that Joyce might have read more as a praiseful remark than an insult. A novel like *Ulysses*, whose form and content are unstable and unpredictable, relishes scatological humour and is unafraid to juxtapose it with an eschatological threnody. It hyperbolizes literary nonlinearity: the stream-of-consciousness technique, famously employed by Molly Bloom in the final chapter of the novel, assumes neither beginning, nor ending. A testament of paradox, Joyce's novel is populated by radically different linguistic varieties (what Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*),[10] innumerable lists, endless obscure literary references, countless puns, an immensity of Shakespearean allusions, and so forth. In point of fact, most of the novel's action is centred on this very multiplicity of discourses. The structure of *Ulysses*, with its peremptorily idiosyncratic chapters and its fluctuating languages, is inevitably tangled with its irreverent content. What Joyce's *Ulysses* stands for, in our discussion of *conventional* and *defiant conventional novels*, is that structural design is not always easily

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[10] See Mikhail Bakhtin's "Discourse in the Novel".

unearthed, and much less categorized. To attempt to fix it within a patterned, categorical discourse is to simultaneously excavate the innermost essence of the text and to inhume its bare framework under heaps of hypothetical speculation.

Once more, I find it necessary to reiterate that the terminology which I have adopted in this dissertation is restricted to the context where it is applied. I have conceived two different types of *structurally fixated novels* only to juxtapose them with *structurally disintegrated fiction*, and prove how novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* are conventional in structural terms, even if unconventional in any other novelistic characteristics. It is not my intention, therefore, to make more than a typological suggestion, regarding a form which has always been subjected to the greatest theoretical debate. If, perchance, the concepts I have presently defined are found to be of significance to other areas of literary study, then such is a fortuitous, albeit unintended, effect.

To conclude this section of the present chapter, the purpose of Joyce's *Ulysses* in this dissertation is merely to demonstrate how *conventional* and *defiant conventional* stand on the same firm ground, divided only in sundry principles, but notwithstanding consciously inhabiting the self-same theoretical house. Thus, *Ulysses* is the gateway which will lead us farther down the path of *structural fixation*, into the territory of *defiant conventional novels*, to a realm which gazes unto the boundless country of *structural disintegration*, but only from the firry crest of its mountains, not stepping down its steep slope to embrace the structural liberation that therein resides.

3.   The Defiant Conventional Novel

The bizarre shapes of the vocables of *Finnegans Wake* may leave an unwary reader stranded among the blank crevices which sunder the sentences imprinted on its pages. The archaeological literary critic, ever shrewd to find clues to a text's significance, will in *Finnegans Wake* drown in a shapeless linguistic mire, whose murky waters gloss over and shade from view the novel's meaning. There, in that book's tumultuous agglomeration of languages, form becomes a serpentine prison, where reader and text are confined to the strangely limitative abundance of interpretative substance. The difficulty in producing a cogent interpretation, or explanation, of the novel can be extrapolated to an analysis of its curiously recurring structure. The novel's last words redirect the reader to its opening lines. The endless interpretative instability resembles a snake eating its own tail, relishing the inner organs of its offspring, simultaneously consuming itself. Is *Finnegans Wake* a text meant to be read linearly, against the grain of its babelish, irreverent form? We may try to answer this question by juxtaposing Joyce's novel with the concept of *structural disintegration*.

Finnegans Wake is arguably one of the most cryptical and celebrated texts of the 20th century, and one might suggest that it is precisely in its semantic obscurity that lies its allurement. Jorge Luis Borges had a few words to share about the Irishman's 'novelbabel' (or in pure Joycean style, 'novabel') in his review of the book, titled "Joyce's Latest Novel". He writes, "*Finnegans Wake* is a concatenation of puns committed in a dreamlike English that is difficult not to categorize as frustrated and incompetent" (Borges, "Joyce's Latest Novel" 195). The Argentinian author would later suggest that Joyce's last novel requires an ideal reader in order to be interpreted, a reader as capable as the novel's author of deciphering its many calembouric riddles (Borges, "A Fragment on Joyce" 221). Given the prolix, overwrought nature of *Finnegans Wake*, interpretations of the text abound, from the well-known study conducted by Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (1944), to Jacques Derrida's extemporary lecture, "Two Words for Joyce" (1982). A novel so elusive in explanation, a *grand jeu de mots* which vehemently rejects any exegesis that might be conducted on it, will, however, in the context of this dissertation, be regarded as a *defiant conventional novel*.

The proposition that Joyce's *Wake* is meant to be read linearly, despite the evidently nonlinear, circular, many-sided interpretative system it requires in order to be read as such, does not intend to be either dismissive of the novel's genius or an authoritative categorization of the text. It is meant only to propose that, given that *structural disintegration* makes explicit the author's disavowal of structural design, *Finnegans Wake* is a text that benefits from the subversive aspect of *structural disintegration* but that does not inscribe itself in its structural methodology. At best, one might tentatively propose that Joyce intended the novel to be read in whichever possible manner, but it would be a vague, pointless exercise to conjure a writer's intentions with regard to his or her novel, and would open an exception to other *structurally fixated novels*. In light of this premise, perhaps some of Dickens's novels were meant to be read as *structurally disintegrated texts*? The question is absurd in its nature and scope. Therefore, in this dissertation I shall not consider authorial intention when not made explicit, either by the author or by the text itself (as in the case of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*). Therefore, the *Wake* remains as it is, a complex, polysemic novel, a *defiant conventional novel*, that, notwithstanding, is based on a fixed structural foundation.

The *defiant conventional novel* is the reverse image of the *conventional novel*, working, within the conceptual framework of *structural fixation*, in opposition to the principles championed by the latter. Firstly, the *defiant conventional novel* is against tradition. It only recurs to tradition to sweep the tapestry of convention off its feet. Contrary to the *conventional novel*, which willingly embraces the traditions within which it is inserted, the *defiant conventional novel* not only flouts authoritative custom, it desires

to reconsider said tradition. In other words, the *defiant conventional novel* wants to redefine normativeness, for, in blooming into existence to disobey the authority of convention, it flies after a redefinition of literary tradition, until at last the experimental novelistic structure it endorses becomes accepted as part of the literary norm (cf. *Bleak House*). Another principle of the *defiant conventional novel* is the extraneous nature of its storytelling. A *defiant conventional novel* might not encompass an intelligible story within its pages. The reason for such is that, because the *defiant conventional novel* repudiates tradition, it counterposes convention with structural, linguistic, and diegetic irreverence. Once compounded, these elements of transgression might veil, with their inexorably dominant spirit, the character of a story, as the text is ploughed and harrowed into fecund ground for literary experimental techniques. It follows therefore that, where the *conventional novel* is subordinated to literary norm and plot, the *defiant conventional novel* is, generally, subordinated to the experimentalism for which it crusades. An intelligible plot is secondary to the *defiant conventional novel*'s agenda, as form and content, intricately attuned, are subjected to the moulding forces of textual subversion. Thus, in this light, a novel like *Finnegans Wake* may be interpreted as a book of textual violence, whose main driving force is the will to rupture one's perceptions of what a novel is, and to redefine it under its idiosyncratic terms. To summarize, the three principles of the *defiant conventional novel* I have enumerated are as follows: rejection of tradition; fluctuating or inexistent storytelling; restless experimentalism.

Hitherto, we have observed how the *conventional novel* and the *defiant conventional novel* are at once dissimilar and alike. Ergo, it would be the duty of the author of this dissertation to introduce his readers, without ado, to an instance of exemplification of novels which the term *defiant conventional novel* encompasses. Thus, I shall explore my view of the concept by availing myself of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), Bohumil Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* (1964), and Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981). It is paramount to state that the preceding examples were chosen for the value of their effect, as opposed to their impact in literary tradition. It would neither make sense nor express cogency for it to not be so, seeing that the objective of this dissertation is not to review or compose a historiography of the *defiant conventional novel*, but rather to describe how these novels' confrontation of the narrative modality of the *conventional novel*, if juxtaposed with *structural disintegration*, adhere to convention and tradition than to the sharp subversion of structural order put in practice by *structurally disintegrated fiction*. As we have already examined Joyce's *Wake* as the prototypical *defiant conventional novel*, it follows that we now proceed to an examination of novels which undertake similar processes of novelistic subversion. All aforementioned authors have, to a certain extent,

contributed toward a revolution of the novel, either by acting as brave pioneers in a still-budding frontline, like Sterne's *Shandy*, or, for example, by rethinking the epic genre and adapting it to the novel form, like Gray's *Lanark*. Further, on a structural plane, all these authors have pervestigated and opposed, as Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, the idea of a *conventional novel* from which innovation may spring only sparsely and, even then, aloof from formal radicalism. Structural design in *defiant conventional novels* is, of necessity, altered by the experimental drive in the text's thematic core. That is, the novel's interpretation is inherently dependent on the experimental techniques harnessed by the author to give shape to the text and its meaning.

In 2010, the London-based publisher Visual Editions brought out a new edition of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a project which proposed to reimagine and reinvigorate Sterne's novel through a process of aesthetic alterations to the original text. These alterations reshaped the novel's 'mien', lending it a more modern countenance, whilst at the same time preserving its innovative strain, thus perpetuating the much-hailed experimentalism indulged by Sterne. In the introduction to this new version of *Shandy*, the British author Will Self, himself an avid author of experimental fiction,[11] propounded the idea of novelistic progress as the diametrical opposite of technological progress. In his view, the progress of technology, the evolution of industrialization, the movement of cogs and wheels, the metallic yawn of the machine, is counteracted by the novel form, which ceaselessly moves toward its source. This modest proposition calls forth the notion of the novel as an endless resource of invention, for it is not impeded by a tradition that anchors and fixes it to a stagnant, decayed wharf of convention (Self 9). Hence, what Will Self sees as the inverted flux of progress, is in fact the movement of progress through a reversal of process. Instead of building up a strong and cohesive body of convention, the novel, by continuously resorting to the fountainhead, a spring that bursts forth an endless number of ideas that are lost looking for means of expression, finds the path of progress by deflecting the threatening throws of evolution. The novel subsists by recreating itself and, thus, fleeing from possible crystalizing exercises of definition.[12]

It may be argued that *Tristram Shandy* is a novel that is concerned with nonlinearity, with the plasticity and malleability of textuality, that is, with the manner through which one may convey meaning using not only content but form and shape. Yet just as it champions this nonlinearity, so

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[11] Apart from his journalistic ventures, Self is known as one of Britain's most transgressive literary voices, with a strong portfolio of novels like *Cock and Bull* (1992), *The Book of Dave* (2006), and *Umbrella* (2012), which play around with language and form, pervaded with Self's notorious usage of the vernacular and his flippant nomenclatural versatility.

[12] It seems pertinent to admit that Self's view of the novel would, on a dialectical level, theoretically clash with the dissertation presently being exposed, for the latter depends on an idea of empiricism that Self consciously eschews.

too is *Shandy* circumscribed by the traditional form attributed to it by Sterne. Even so, one may gather from it, considering its conception on an early stage of the history of the novel, the elements which were much later to question the fixated presentation of a literary work. Of *Tristram Shandy* and the disintegration of structural form, given the extension of the present dissertation, it should suffice to quote the American critic, Michael Schmidt:

> An inexorable story creates distance; we stand outside it, as we stand outside the action of a play. But think of a play in which there are problems of continuity in the production, the lighting malfunctions, a flat falls in the second scene, actors forget or extemporize lines, jumble up the scenes: we are drawn into the drama that underlies the drama—the process area, not the product area. This is what Sterne brings us: not a failure of orchestration but rather a fascination with the process of annotation. (Schmidt 151)

After a brief submersion in the raucous universe of Sterne, we shall turn our attention to Bohumil Hrabal, a celebrated Czech writer who met his absurd demise when attempting to feed some winged creatures[13] "from the fourth floor window of his retirement home" (Hrabal [1]). Time it took but the formidable correlation between orality and textuality eventually found its way to literary expression in the novel form,[14] and Bohumil Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age*, a novel comprised of a single paragraph, in turn encompassing a single (unfinished) sentence, attempts to capture the defining moment which united both strands of storytelling, the oral and the textual. It is a book whose style rests unmarred by the conclusive punctuational impediment that so tightly binds the syntax of a language to a system of limitation: the full stop. The novel, brief in length yet vast in wit, evokes the roots of a tradition of oral narrative that would posthumously father the novel form. Hrabal's book falls into that category of novels which lend to the learned reader the impression of its author having listened in on the echoes of the universe and transcribed it, syllable by syllable, unremittingly, to paper. The long-winded sentence, which extends itself beyond a hundred pages, suggests a novelistic experiment designed to test the limits of the form. The structure of the text, a single corridor of broken images and verbal stimuli,

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[13] A descendant of the *Columba Livia*, otherwise commonly referred to as 'pigeon'.

[14] See Albert B. Lord's study of Homer and oral literature, *The Singer of Tales* (New York, 1971).

questions not only grammatical authorities but also the mechanism of writing itself. If the means of expression are compressed into an indissoluble, endless paragraph, then the author appears to be asking two questions of a rhetorical mould. First, is it possible to write a novel that wholly flouts syntactical convention? Second, are all stories, in the beginning, before being subjected to the demanding architect's influence, one inexhaustible sentence that flows with the passage of time, ceaselessly unfolding itself into infinity? The nature of these queries seems embedded in the structural design of the novel, further prompting one to re-evaluate the experimental stamp marked on the pages of Hrabal's book and to consider whether the novel form is no less than an adulteration of storytelling. In other words, Hrabal appears to suggest that structural design, that is, the tampering mechanisms with which the hypothetical author inflicts a systematic configuration on his or her novel to accommodate storytelling to a higher meaning, is a degradation of the pure essence of a prototypical story which, once free from the constraining skeleton of structural design and purpose, is expressed in one unfiltered solitary endless sentence. [15] In this sense, the novel is degenerated storytelling.

Yet, Hrabal's novel, as unconventional as it might be as a novel embedded within the historiography of the form, cannot but be acknowledged as a *defiant conventional, structurally fixated novel*, for even if the novel manages to capture the raw formless core of storytelling itself by the throat—incidentally heralding the advent of *generative fiction*—it nonetheless carries on being paradoxically fixed to its author's structural design. The reader, once more, has only to sit down and 'listen' to the story enclosed in its pages. By conceiving a novel that goes against tradition and form, design and fabrication, *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* has recourse to an imperative novelistic construction to postulate its incongruous denial of 'structural purpose'. It is significant to consider the possible implications of this contradictory stance. Perhaps the afterimage left by Hrabal's *Dancing Lessons* is that any attempt to produce an antithetic novel, or an antinovel, or an *anti-roman*, is in truth but another failed endeavour that contributes only to the proteanism of the literary form. It is important to keep in mind that, in Hrabal's case, the attempt to subvert the

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[15] Cf. William Gaddis's last novel *Agape, Agape*, even though the question may be raised whether there is a story concealed by the novel's erudite reflections or whether the text, taken for itself, might be read instead as a philosophical treatise. Perhaps, hidden beneath mounds upon mounds of critical material exposed and excised in Gaddis's novel, there lies a textual flâneur, a novel eager to be unshackled from the constraining contrivances of the form. From its very first word, a blunt "No" (Gaddis 1)—which could be interpreted either as an homage to Joyce or an overt denial of the Irish master—to its very last, "anything" (96)—a coda that leaves one staring at an interminable void of expression, following a brief meditation on youth—the novel stands its ground in the unfathomable battle for laureated experimentalism by being entirely written in a single paragraph which takes upon itself to congregate the fragments of an unwritten magnum opus of academic research and salvage the discarded remnants of the "swamp of paradox, perversity, ambiguity, aporia" (70) that compose the bedrock of the pungent "collapse of everything" (2).

fixation of a narrative to a selection of formal rules is significantly rendered more limitative than if the novel were to be designed with a view to a more 'traditional' configuration. Hence, *Dancing Lessons for the Advanced in Age* does not so much as limits the text to the microcosm of a shackled individual sentence, it fixates the novel in a narrow valley poised between two distinctly outlined peaks, its beginning and ending.

Of *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, Alasdair Gray remarked, "Spending half a lifetime turning your soul into printer's ink is a queer way to live" (Gray 573). These words well-nigh immerse the novel, with its copious "Index of Plagiarisms" and disordered structural configuration, in metaphorical amber: *Lanark* is a mirror to the pandemoniac soul of its author. The product of a Glaswegian intellect, a *Ulysses* belonging to the northern side of the sceptered isle, *Lanark* reads like a maze, one which is progressively built around the reader. It is the first novel that Alasdair Gray saw published, a remarkable achievement, considering that it is often regarded as his *magnum opus*. In his history of the novel form, *The Novel: A Biography*, Michael Schmidt glosses on the interesting antithetical parallel between Joyce's *Ulysses*, the Irish master's second novel, and *Lanark*. He writes, "[*Lanark*] is the best point of entry into Gray, the chronology of whose work seems reversed: we get our *Ulysses* first and then *Portrait of the Artist*" (111). Gray, in truth, deemed this convoluted tome his "Portrait of the Artist as a Frustrated Young Glaswegian" (Gray 570).

Lanark is a novel with a "deprogramming purpose" (Schmidt 111), whose fundamental intent is to unsettle and rearrange the atoms that make up the elements of the novel form. The Scottish novelist William Boyd suggests that it was *Lanark*'s impeccable structure, its compound form combining naturalism and fantasy, that helped consecrate the text and raise it to the superlative level in which it presently stands. Boyd writes, "Gray needed the overarching machinery of the allegory and fable to make *Lanark* transcend its origins" (W. Boyd xiii), acknowledging the relevance of the structural design of the text to its overall significance. It is a novel that desires "to be read in one order but eventually thought of in another" (Gray 483), whose curious distribution of its parts follows an apparently arbitrary interspersion. Howbeit, just as *Finnegans Wake* is not to be considered *structurally disintegrated*, Gray's novelistic anthology of ideas, *Lanark*, cannot be categorized as such since it is unwaveringly attached to a fixed narrative inscribed in an unbending form. Admittedly, as one scholar acutely pointed out, even though "the text of *Lanark* certainly cannot change, the narrative can be arranged in such a way that the fictional speech-acts of the narrator possess a hypothetical, future reference" (Miller 112). Yet, even if one takes into account the possibility of devising one's "own narrative of *Lanark*'s adventures outside of the Institute" (112), the fact remains that this act would be of a speculative nature, entirely disavowed by the

novel, which invites reflection on the metamorphic structural nature of the novel form, but is adamant in its unswerving loyalty to a structural purpose. The novel's tailpiece, "How *Lanark* grew", bears witness to this idea of a purposeful structural design, for in it the author writes, "unlike James Joyce's portrait I intended my artist to end tragically" (Gray 569). It is advisable, however, for one to disregard, or at least to turn a deaf ear to, an author's, interpretation of his or her own work, often a revisionist afterthought. Yet, in *Lanark*'s case, and considering that *structural disintegration* is, to a degree, purposefully executed by the author to force a capitulation of his or her powers to the reader, it seems unwise to deduce that the novel may be read in a manner contrary to its author's expectations. As we will later see, such attitude is derivative from the general effect of *structural disintegration*. We might suppose *Lanark* to be symptomatic of the disruptive force of the latter, but not categorize it as a *structurally disintegrated novel*. Granted, its unusual, jumbled up narrative, with "a prologue before book one, an interlude in the centre, and an epilogue two or three chapters before the end" (483) might here be merely regarded as *defiantly conventional*, but the novel may also stand at the gates of this chapter brandishing the flag of *pre-generative* and *generative fiction*, its eyes confidently set on the impending horizon of the following chapter.

Our perusal of novels which defy linguistic competence, which are coiled in circling streams of ideas and thought, which reverse time and chronology, which sprawl over the pages of a book in an incessant locution, which juggle and bend the design of a text until the foundations of the literary form begin to give in, has all but confirmed the principles of *defiant conventional fiction*. In consequence of what I call an attempt to 'defixate' the body of convention that permeates the literary form, these novels often generate a tension between text and reader which can only be nullified if the text becomes *structurally disintegrated*. A novel which is comprised of a single hundred-page long paragraph, for example, is a novel that invites the reader to step out of his or her comfort zone and test his or her awareness of the limits, conventions, and language of the novel. Regardless, the reader will inevitably meet a wall which partitions the author's structural purpose from the reader's process of perusal, for the expectations with which s/he is provided, expectations which are in part constructed by past experiences with the form, an empirical rulebook, will force an estrangement from the text's form that may only be 'fixed' (in the sense that it may be repaired) if the text is 'defixated'. This happens because the reader, who is accustomed to the basic elements of a novel—viz. chapter divisions; dialogical exchanges; a logical and linear sequence of events—will find in these novels' defiance of authority a new modality, a new philosophy of the novel that, because it is distinctly formed for each individual *defiant conventional novel*, and because it is not the

rule/convention, requires the reader to adapt to a new circumstance and to learn a new literary language.[16]

It is important to restate that the considerations which I have drawn thus far on *conventional* and *defiant conventional novels* are related only to the structural design of the novel form. As we have seen, the line that divides *conventional* from *defiant conventional* is remarkably tenuous, and it is understandably arguable whether there is such a line outside of the system I have devised. The fact remains, however, that both types of novels are related to a *structural fixation* of the text, and that one's convention and the other's experimentation pale in the face of *structural disintegration*. Any formal experimentalism indulged by Sterne or Gray, for example, has inevitably to belong to a category distinct from a *structurally disintegrated novel*. Admittedly, the dissimulation of traditional authorial structural designs in these novels makes manifest their confrontation of the modality of the *conventional novel*, yet it cannot allow them to move beyond a structural defiance of the novel form. As a result of the incipience of *structural disintegration*, the project of *defiant conventional novels* to reconsider the literary form within which they are exercised is dismantled and, to a certain extent, negated. As they are assimilated into convention, once-transgressive literary mechanisms, such as *Shandy*'s looping narrative or Hrabal's interminable and introspective sentence, behold the usurpation of their subversive power. New unconventional forms are required, new ways of thinking the novel form, which correspond to its shapeshifting nature. As we will later ascertain in the concluding tract of this dissertation, it was this condition of renewability that allowed the event of *structural disintegration* to take place, causing *defiant conventional novels*, of the nature of Joyce's *Wake* and Gray's *Lanark*, to be merely symptomatic literary utterances of a larger phenomenon.

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[16] Such is the case, for example, with the novels of the Portuguese author José Saramago, whose disobedience of conventional form creates a vocabulary of literary expression that requires a period of adaptation in which the reader may mould his or her expectations to an unfamiliar environment, where dialogue and description are embedded in a text which renounces punctuational commitment.

III. Against Structure

1. The Structure of Denial

The hand that penned *Pale Fire* knew not, when it first waltzed around the white expanse of the proemial page, scribbling and drafting the inaugural words of that particular novel, whether the reader—who, by strike of fate or untrustworthy chance, directed the eye toward its enticing papered spine and, grabbing the soft volume by the hand, conveyed it to the quiet ambience of his or her parlour—would purposefully ignore the foreword, commentary, and index therein included, and hop right into the eponymous autobiographical poem of four hundred and ninety-nine couplets and one final, solitary verse. The novel was published in 1962, the same year a Frenchman would present to the jaded literary world a novelistic experiment which would initiate a new paradigm in postmodern fiction.[17] It is undoubtedly peculiar that one of the novels which I have selected as a precursor of *pre-generative fiction* should be published in the same year Saporta's novel, a specimen of the *generative* type, was brought to the world. I am obliged to open this chapter with a conceptual clarification regarding the usage of the prefix *pre-*, followed by the noun *generative*, in my typology of the novel. Commonly conceived as signifying 'that which precedes' or, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Of time or order of succession, in sense 'before; anterior, prior, or previous to; preceding, earlier than; prefiguring, tending towards" (*OED*, "pre-, *prefix*"), a derivation of the Latin *prae-*, which had, among its several unrelated usages, a similar acceptation, the *pre-* prefix is used in the adjective *pre-generative* as 'that which precedes the state of generative', that is to say the state which is still to be fully developed into a generative work. In this sense, novels like *Pale Fire* may simultaneously coexist as *pre-generative* with *generative* works such as *Composition No.1*, for their *pre-generative* state is one of essence and purpose and not one of technique. This chapter, whose title brandishes a pointed oppositional preposition to demarcate its contrasting view with the title of the preceding chapter, will, as disclosed in the introduction to this dissertation, cover the concept of *structural disintegration* in its entirety, from the harbingering neophytic *pre-generative* novels to the jumbled up cosmos of *idiorealism*.

Presently, the first priority is to introduce the concept of *structural disintegration*, which is the object of this dissertation. If *structural fixation* is the textual phenomenon by which the structure of a text is fixated to a predetermined order, be it linear or non-linear, exercised by an author, which

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[17] I am referring, of course, to Marc Saporta and his *Composition No.1*, to which I have alluded already in the preceding chapter.

employs a 'structural purpose' on the text that cannot be extrapolated without significant damage to the meaning of the text, and to which the reader and exegete of the text is prescribed, then *structural disintegration* must stand on the other end of the scale. That which is disintegrated, in the realm of fiction we at present discuss, bears no conventional, preconceived structure and is dependent on the reader's active participation, who gives it shape and consistence. Without the reader, the *structurally disintegrated novel* possesses only the meaning which the author attributed to it: the meaning of disintegrated forms, that is, its state as a text with no imposed structure.[18] In other words, a readerless *structurally disintegrated novel* is formless and meaningless, in that it has no meanings embedded in it, except for the aforementioned meaning of textual disintegration. It is a novel yet to be created, a collection of paragraphs, sentences, or loose pages, which depend on an extraneous force, the reader, to be compiled and bestowed significance. We are thus faced with a definition of *structural disintegration*: it is a structure which has no form or meaning until form or meaning are attributed to it. The materials for the construction of the building are at the reader's disposal, and only with the reader's contribution can the building be erected. In other words, the novel only exists in and with the reader, and not as a solitary object.

Concerning *generative fiction*, which is the first type of *structurally disintegrated novel* we will analyse, a few considerations are in order. The reader of *generative fiction* is the creator of an object. Responsible for the development of the work, charged with the production of meaning, initiated in the mysteries of the creative process, the reader of *generative fiction* is as much the author of the *generative text* as the one who first devised it. Mark, as a preparatory statement to the definition of the concept, the anatomy of our object. *Generative fiction* is composed of fragments, flakes and particles which are subtly linked to each other, and yet physically (or impliedly) separated. The reader's task is to unite and collate these fragments, to build his or her own structure of the text, and become, in a sense, the novel's *other author*. Whereas the *original author* of the novel is responsible for the creation of these displaced fragments, the novel only comes into being when the reader steps out of his or her passivity and actively participates in the novel's construction. It is by this action that the reader becomes the *other author*.

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[18] Here, an important distinction should be made between *generative fiction* and *idiorealist fiction*, for whilst *generative fiction*'s dependence on the reader to produce meaning is inherent to its purpose, that of being the source of a multitude of texts and fictions, with *idiorealism*, as we will see, that is not quite the case. Yet my intention with this passage is not to boldly state that the *structurally disintegrated text* is created with negative-meaning or no meaning at all. Johnson's *idiorealist The Unfortunates* possesses meaning of its own, regardless of the reader. Yet that meaning is entailed with the disintegrated aspect of the text: it hinges on the form of the novel. Since its form is thus disintegrated, it is the reader who will give it shape, hence any interpretative exercise inferred by the reader will necessarily be conditional on the shape s/he lends it. In sum, the existence of meaning, even in Johnson's novel, only surfaces after the disintegrated form of the novel is assimilated into a 'temporary' object, or text.

Let us recall the etymological root of the word *structure*, the Latin verb *struere*, that is, to assemble. If *structurally disintegrated novels* are composed of broken pieces meant to be reassembled by an active reader, and if *structurally disintegrated fiction* subsists in an apparent lack of order, then one may safely conclude that it is the reader, and not the author, who concedes a structure to the novel and, thus, who gives order to an ostensible chaos. With this in mind, one may suggest that the process of *structural disintegration* depends on the act of rewriting. The reader, the *other author*, is the catalyser of the creation of other fictions. In order for this reader-dependent creation to happen, the novel must first possess an initial form. The first form of the novel is the one it assumes when it is conceived and materialized, that is, when the *original author* composes it. Since the novel is then fragmented, structurally disintegrated, the first form becomes unknown to the reader, being shadowed by the new, arbitrary order with which it presents itself. This new order, at the mercy of the reader's active participation, is potentially infinite, because it cannot be contained by its author's intentions, since these are now unknown. The reader, therefore, becomes the novel's *other author*, effectively rewriting, rebuilding, re-imagining the novel's first form. The original fiction metamorphoses into a well of possibilities: the original fiction becomes many possible fictions. It is this process of fictions which generate other fictions that I define as *generative fiction*.

Before I proceed to an analysis of a considerable group of *generative novels*, let us return to the beginning of the present chapter, to *pre-generative fiction*, or that which precedes *generative fiction*, that which possesses the elements or principles of *generative fiction* in itself, yet refrains from applying them. By understanding the principles *generative fiction* entails, thus removed from the generative context, it is hoped that the reader of the present dissertation will grasp the essence of my argument. It should be understood, without ado, that there are certainly other *pre-generative* novels in the incommensurable range of literary production, yet I chose these four novels because they better evince the generative characteristics of fiction, thus allowing my argument to pass through the meshes of potential verbosity, facilitating conciseness and conceding one neither to wander from precision nor to break the chain of reasoning.

2. An Overview of *Pre-Generative fiction*

Pale Fire is one of the four novels which are defined in this dissertation as *pre-generative fiction*, the other three being Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual*, and Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Owing to the term's conceptual flexibility, Nabokov's novel is but one example of how experimental fiction, in particular that imbued with a postmodern

essence, entertains and is circumscribed to the idea of a fiction that branches off into a theoretical infinity of other fictions, sprawling pathways of books that are replicated or rewritten or reimagined within a labyrinth that is their mirror. The sustenance of this novelistic theory of infinite expansion is the act of writing itself, which is founded on a language of textuality and a vocabulary of repetition: the text is linguistically informed by other texts which precede it and it is intertextually related, as a secondary or subordinate branch of a tree which spreads its arms to a fathomless point in space, to a body of literature that resists classification, or bibliographical ascertainment, as it is continuously in expansion. The notion of a pure novel, a novel which is unblemished by conventional and paradigmatic values, by intertextual relationships, or by verbal allusion to the literary, is as ludicrous a conception as the hypothesis of a novel dissociated from a cultural, social, political, linguistic system, a novel that precedes History and supersedes language itself, a novel whose subliminal meaning is the absence of a primary structure. A *structurally disintegrated novel* effectively denies structure, but only on a formal textual level, within the system of narrative and narrative reception, not breaking away from structures which are, often unconsciously, embedded in the code of the text, such as language, ideology, or even the individuality of the author. This postulation of the pure novel would, of necessity, require a novel that bears no extratextual meanings, that is to say that it could not allude, as a system-in-itself, to a system transcending that of the novel; the pure novel would, in essence, be a cosmos on its own, a reality separated from the reality in which it is produced, a separate, sentient textual world. Yet, then it would no longer be a 'novel', for to articulate its form into a category which already possesses a burden of meaning would be self-defeating and fallacious. To return to the idea of the infinite concatenation, consider the following example: Text X informs Text Y which, in turn, informs Text Z which is also informed by Text X (and G, H, I, and so on), therefore devising a web of interconnected texts that is far too large to contain in any bibliographical record. As a consequence, a link to tradition, to that-which-came-before that antecedes the text, is contrived, an umbilical cord to which even *structurally disintegrated fiction* is inevitably bonded.

A novel or a poem or a foreword or an index or a commentary to the poem, *Pale Fire* can be read at once under a *structurally fixated* or *structurally disintegrated* light, for if, on the one hand, it relies on the reader's understanding of the novel as a whole (that is, grasping the novel as a linear sequence of chapters, a text which begins with the Foreword and concludes with the Index), it also suggests to the reader its perusal as a *structurally disintegrated text*. We shall see why the latter suggested reading is fallacious within the structural microcosm of the novel. A characteristic *Pale Fire* appears to share with other *structurally disintegrated novels* is a self-awareness as a disintegrated novel which

possesses no specific reading method, which may be tailored into a hundred different books, a textual spiral staircase that, like a snail's shell, rotates around a point in infinity, the same pattern imprinted on a funnel for an indefinite number of times, a pattern whose impression is far more significant than its execution. At the end of the foreword, Charles Kinbote, Botkin, Shade, or even Nabokov himself,[19] depending on the reader's perspective and interpretative judgement, addresses the reader and provides a suggestion on the method of approach exacted on the novel. Although not labelled as such, this suggestion may be understood as a 'Table of Instructions', an alternative to a linear perlection of the novel, similar to Cortázar's or Ballard's reading suggestions which are erected, like a portico, or chiselled in obsidian, like an ominous inscription, at the entrance to their novels. Given the nature of the commentary's subject matter—expatiations on Zembla and the story of its last king, Charles II, the Beloved, and his escape from the mischievous anti-Royalists—the following passage from the final paragraph of the 'Foreword' comes across as more parodic in tone than purposefully instructive. In particular, one draws attention to the absurdity in the suggestion of acquisition of multiple copies of the text to facilitate the browse and simultaneous perusal of the poem and its commentary:

> Although these notes, in conformity with custom, come after the poem, the reader is advised to consult them first and then study the poem with their help, re-reading them of course as he goes through its text, and perhaps, after having done with the poem, consulting them a third time so as to complete the picture. I find it wise in such cases as this to eliminate the bother of back-and-forth leafings by either cutting out and clipping together the pages with the text of the thing, or, even more simply, purchasing two copies of the same work which can then be placed in adjacent positions on a comfortable table . . . (Nabokov 23)

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[19] As Brian Boyd indicates, *Pale Fire* mirrors Nabokov's own translation, into English, of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1823-31), a translation which, in addition to the translator's introduction, notes, additional fragments, commentary, and index, encompasses four volumes (although the Princeton University Press has recently brought out a version that condensates and abridges the Bollingen Foundation 1975 (4 vol.) edition into a 2-volume edition, which excludes the Russian original text, included in the 4th volume of the original edition, as well as the appendixes and other elements of the critical apparatus) and whose scholarly commentary is far more extensive, in length, than the celebrated 'novel in verse': "[*Pale Fire*'s] design owes much to Nabokov's translation of and commentary to the greatest of Russian poems, Alexander Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin* (1823–31), which he worked on between 1949 and 1957. In published form, Nabokov's prefatory matter occupies 110 pages; his translation of Pushkin's poem, 240; the commentary, 1,087; and the index, 109—making four volumes in all, roughly four times the size of *Pale Fire* but in much the same proportions" (B. Boyd, *Pale Fire* 67).

Exemplary demonstrations, or in the case of the literary exegesis, passages from the text being glossed, as the preceding one, often prove more efficacious, at least when the common vocabulary employed in communicative exchanges does not prove sufficient. In order to illustrate how the novel requires at least a certain conception of linearity to be laid out for interpretation, one refers to a passage from one of Nabokov's diaries, where, as the author's authoritative biographer, Brian Boyd, pointed out, the author registered the idea that Botkin commits suicide just before completing the book's index, explaining the lack of page references after the "Zembla" entry with its author's untimely self-murder.[20]

In a sense, then, it is easy to see why *Pale Fire* is *fixated* and *disintegrated* concomitantly. It is a poem and a collection of annotations to the poem, both of which can be read separately and both of which tell different stories. It is a foreword and an index that provide additional information and help complete the puzzling narrative's lacunae, as evinced by Nabokov's notes on Botkin's suicide. The reader, thus faced with this quartet of narratives, may endeavour to read either one or the other without feeling obliged to respect the requirement of reading both, or none. And yet, it is the illusion, and not the genuine possibility, of choice that pervades *Pale Fire*. The text keeps calling attention to cross-references between the Foreword and the Commentary, and within the Commentary itself. Kinbote (or Botkin) often addresses the reader in the midst of a commentary to allude to an earlier or later note, as in the case of his commentary on line 101, a reflection on the merit of religious faith in the production of artistic works, which refers the reader to the commentary on line 549 (Nabokov 96-7; 177-80).

The generative aspect of the text, which is absent in purpose and yet represented, should also be taken into account. The annotations to the poem share an intimate connection with *generative fiction*: the ability to generate stories and plots from an original source, in this case Botkin's copious, unreliable dilations and expatiations, borrowing inspiration from Shade's loose words or decontextualized sentences, on his allegedly native land, Zembla. And yet, as stated, it is merely an illusion of choice that composes the foundation of the novel, as the novel's original structure is the form with which it presents itself to the reader, the only possible form, and the novel cannot be disassociated from it without losing its narrative value. It is a novel of transition that understands the principle of *structural disintegration* yet refrains from embracing and moulding itself to it, thus remaining on the 'fixated' side of the border. If *Pale Fire* tentatively immerses a finger in the ocean

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[20] In one of the notes to the second part of his biography of the Russian author, he writes: "In his 1962 diary, VN also noted of Kinbote: "He commits suicide before completing his index, leaving the last entry without p[age] ref[eferences]"" (B. Boyd, *American Years* 709).

of *structural disintegration*, portraying its mechanics but not applying them to its form, the following novel entertains the conception of a text that can be multiplied from a finite source.

Paris. An event. Something happens on a bus. A writer listens and, later, records. The ingredients for Raymond Queneau's 1947 book, *Exercises in Style*, an exploration of the modes of writing, an anatomy of literature, dissecting expression, vivisecting form, cutting open the flesh of the Logos and looking in, discovering the essence of fiction: its (re)generative nature. Queneau unbalances the contingent character of storytelling, he upsets the balance of systematization. The very taxonomical qualification of the book is at risk, for one may easily file it under the label of poem, essay, composition, handbook of writing, didactic compilation of exercises, combinational textual symphony, novel, and so forth. In this dissertation, I shall position the book under the pale light of the term 'novel', ignoring, but not rejecting, the qualities of its many distinct facets. The novel's proximity to the function of *structural disintegration*, particularly to *generative fiction*, is self-evident: as the reader is invited to create new fictions out of an initial fiction, so too does Queneau demonstrate that the same fiction, even if limited by a linear, 'beginning-middle-end' structure, can unfold and explode into other different fictions. Fiction is, in Queneau's perspective, a process of continuous expansion. And that is what *Exercises in Style* most accurately crystallizes: the metamorphosis of a rude chrysalid into a splendorous swarm of Lepidoptera. The novel returns to the roots of romance, where a series of events, a collection of scenes, is compiled and given a sense of unity. Except that, in Queneau's case, this anthology of episodes is reduced to a single event, multiplied and retold ninety-nine times in ninety-nine different styles. The incident, an ordinary matter, is easily summarized in little under fifty words. Queneau did precisely that in the chapter aptly titled "Litotes", which I shall include here, in Barbara Wright's translation, to demonstrate but one example of the extensive range of rhetorical styles employed by the polymathic writer:

> A few of us were travelling together. A young man, who didn't look very
> intelligent, spoke to the man next to him for a few moments, then he went
> and sat down. Two hours later I met him again; he was with a friend and
> was discussing clothing matters. (Queneau 5)

Queneau vitiates the convention of progression using the elements of narration, that is, he eschews the necessity to narrate, in a novel, a story whose elements experience a variation from its embryonic stage to the final paragraphic statement: in sum, Queneau subverts convention by replicating it ninety-nine times to construct a novel, or antinovel, or an antitext, an exercise in

textual madness cacophony polyphony or rhetorical dodecaphony, which is clothed in a non-analysable, non-taxonomized, non-restricted shape. From Queneau's *pre-generative* exercise, that creates a narrative of infinity from a closed narrative circuit, nonetheless subjected to the author's control, it is pertinent to look at Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*. A novel which encompasses many novels within it, or many beginnings of possible novels, *If on a winter's night* takes up Queneau's idea of a novel-of-novels and elaborates a story around it.

Calvino's *If on a winter's night* tells the story of a reader, identified in the second-person ('You', that is, the novel's reader, is the main character of the novel), who buys a copy of Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller* only to discover that s/he has acquired a defective copy which contains not Calvino's book, but Tazio Bazakbal's *Outside the town of Malbork*, a (fictional) Polish novel (Calvino, *If on a winter's night* 28). *If on a winter's night* then leads the reader through mazes of fictions, where novels have a beginning but no ending, and are misprinted or badly translated. As the text 'conjures' other novels and *other author*s, in the protagonist's desperate attempt to recover the original *If on a winter's night a traveller*, the reader is suddenly faced with an inevitable truth: the novel is not about finding Calvino's book, but about the process of creating an idea of it. That is to say, *If on a winter's night*, the novel, foregrounds the reader's journey through countless texts and copies of texts and translations of texts, only to arrive, in the book's twelfth and final chapter, at the original text itself (260). That the reader is not rewarded with the actual content of *If on a winter's night a traveller* might mean one of two things: either that the text sought after is the text itself, and in that sense the novel circles around itself, the ending leading one to the beginning, once more recommencing the search for the original novel, or that the narrative of *If on a winter's night* is extratextual, in the novels that the reader imagined in his or her head, in the fictions that were produced in the solitude of one's dreams, in the promises of a book yet unread. Calvino's novel is a conscious homage to the fiction which originate other fictions, the eternal recurrence of new forms, derived from one original source, from a causal principle in which the possibility of novel fictions is already understood: an original fiction that encompasses all possible fictions within itself. Even if no novel in the book is ever completed—for one is only rewarded with glimpses of texts, not with actual, complete form—there is a sense of continuity, a unity which binds all of these stories together. The reader is confronted with the impossibility of conclusion, even of the novel itself, and must be contented by the fragments left behind, fragments which are cracks in an opaque wall of words, that allow the reader to go beyond the text. For this reason, that is, the incapacity to know the original form of the narrative and the intrinsic desire to recover it, Calvino's *If on a winter's*

night a traveller is the literary representation of the struggle between the fictional narratives we call *generative fiction* and the reader who peruses them, their *other author*.

The process of constructing a narrative, especially one based on previously established elements and forms, is akin to that of organizing a puzzle. The pieces are gathered into a chaotic jumble which must be organized by the puzzler in order for there to be a sense of purpose, or a compliance with the 'big picture', and meaning. To compose a fiction, in a sense, is to build a puzzle, in that the puzzle-maker is making use of a certain imagery and of a conceptual baggage which have been brought into existence by a predecessor, by something-that-came-before. These basic units are to be understood as, among other things, components of language, of an ideological system, the constituent parts of the author's experience which are reworked and weaved into a personal pattern. The author employs a thread which derives from a patchwork of elements that are not necessarily his or her creation. *Structural disintegration* doubles this relationship between puzzle-maker and puzzle by introducing the reader to the equation, and attributing to him a renunciation of passivity and an introduction to the production of the puzzle. Thus, the puzzle-maker/author/*original author* elaborates a puzzle based on elements which are part of a cultural, linguistic, ideological inheritance, and then proposes a re-elaboration of said puzzle by a puzzler/reader/*other author* who will adapt it and mould it according to his or her own cultural, linguistic, ideological inheritance. The final product, as we have seen, is a compound novel, composed by an *original* and an *other author*. This simile of puzzle-making and fiction-building is linked to the fourth and final *pre-generative* novel in our discussion, George Perec's *Life A User's Manual*.

Perec's novel is a collection of ninety-nine chapters, a group of interrelated stories bearing the subtitle *Fictions* (or, in the telling French original, *Romans*). One might regard it as a narrative puzzle, the reader having to establish links and connections between the several residents of 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier. *Life*'s peculiar method of composition, keeping in mind the artist's alliance to the literary group OuLiPo,[21] bears witness to the novel's complex structural configuration. Of all the *pre-generative texts* I have selected, Perec's stands farthest from the concept of *structural disintegration*, for it is arranged according to a specific set of pre-determined rules which aided the author to devise this finely-crafted novel. The *pre-generative* aspect of this particular novel, in fact, lies not in the text itself but in Perec's methodological approach to the creation of the text. David Bellos, in his biography of the French polymath, transcribes Perec's notes from the author's

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[21] Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle.

personal agenda, taken after a meeting with OuLiPo, notes which elucidate, in detail, the process of creation of *Life*:

> *A plan for a novel in semantic Oulipian mode:*
> *Knight's tour on a ten-square board*
> *Latin bi-square of order 10*
> *false* dizine
> *description of a painting: a house with the façade removed.*
> *Ten floors, ten rooms per floor.* (Bellos 508)[22]

Designing the novel's structure in a 10x10 grid, in the shape of a building with 10 floors, including basement, and 10 rooms across each floor, Perec made use of a bi-square of order 10, introduced to the author by Claude Berge, a renowned mathematician and member of the OuLiPo group, to distribute characters or objects or locations in a combinatorial fashion. Using the bi-square allowed the author to test one hundred different combinations, thus laying out the inner skeleton of the text before initiating the process of writing it, further applying the chess problem of 'The Knight's Tour' to provide it with a sequence (Bellos 393-94). Yet, as Bellos reports, once Perec noticed that to apply only two lists of ten different elements to a novel of considerable length would produce a repetitive, restricted composition, he opted for a solution that furnished the novel with further layers of generative possibility:

> The most elegant solution for Perec, because it was the simplest, would be to use the bi-square device over and over again. In the end, he employed twenty-one bi-squares, each comprising two lists of ten "elements", giving forty-two lists in all, with 420 "things" to distribute, forty-two to a box (and never the same forty-two twice). (Bellos 515)

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[22] As evinced by the above-quoted passage, Perec designed his novel around the infamous chess problem "The Knight's Tour", on which David Bellos expounds subsequently, explaining its basic precept in layman terms: "The "knight's tour" problem to which Perec refers in his outline is the fastidious conundrum set by the chess piece called the knight (the "horseman" in French), which leaps two squares in any direction and then one further square at a ninety-degree angle to its first direction of move. Getting such a quirky jumper to land once only on each of the sixty-four squares on a standard eight-by-eight chessboard can take a month of Sundays, the worst of it being that there is more than one possible solution" (Bellos 508).

Considering the overall scheme of the text, with the arbitrary yet carefully calculated disposition of four-hundred and twenty elements over one-hundred distinct squares, structured around 'The Knight's Tour' chess problem, one may start to see the novel's relevance to *generative fiction*. The purpose it embodies in this dissertation is one of a novel-in-construction, that is, not the novel *per se*, but the primitive configuration of the novel. In other words, the novel without the text. Compare the similarity of its architectural preoccupation, its 10x10 design of a building and Perec's desire to remove the building's façade and expose its inner workings, with my early metaphor of the novel as a building. The author, responsible for the schematic of the text, using the many combinational elements at his service, designed a text that, far from being fixated in its final form, that is, the novel *Life A User's Manual*, harboured, in an embryonic state, all the possibilities of an ever-ramifying fiction. Likewise, *structural disintegration* depends on the infinite construction of a narrative beneath a finite arching structure. To return to the analogy of the puzzle, created by Perec himself: Perec, puzzle-maker and puzzler, constructed a narrative based on a set of rules; the *original author*, puzzle-maker, elaborates said list of rules (in this case, a text to be read in an arbitrary fashion) which are to be complied by a reader, the puzzler, *other author*, who constructs a narrative, the result of potentially infinite fictional (permutational) interactions, that is limited only by the finite characteristics of the rules to which s/he is bound.

3. One-Hundred and Fifty Beginnings: Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1*, Edouard Levé's *Works*

In the beginning, there was the word and the text and the novel. Then, with the advent of *structural disintegration* and *generative fiction*, there was only the word and the text, but no novel. The disappearance of the novel requires no detective to unravel its mystifying nature: the novel vanished, but left behind its disintegrated anatomy for the inquisitive reader to study and attempt to recreate its initial form, though to no avail. Hence, the reader of a *structurally disintegrated text* is tasked with the reconstruction of a novel. I would further argue, in particular referring to *generative fiction*, that from the *structurally disintegrated novel* there emanates a will-to-reconstruction, which pervades the very syllables of the text. We have seen this already in the first part of the present chapter.

The object of the following five subsections is to focus on *generative fiction*, from its inception, its elements, its characteristics, to its structural effects. One should, first of all, ascertain a specific point in time and space where the first *structurally disintegrated novel* was conceived. On the

prolegomenous tract of this dissertation, I ascertained a point in time and space for the first conception of a plausible first *structurally disintegrated text*: the works of Herbert Quain. Yet Jorge Luis Borges being responsible for the invention of Herbert Quain, it follows that the first *structurally disintegrated text* is actually a non-existent text. It exists only beyond the crevices of materiality and conjecture. The following contender is William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (on which we will focus in the next part of this chapter) which was published in 1959. Already the hazy delineation of a chronology is visible to the reader: one of the first *structurally disintegrated texts* was a *generative text*; *idiorealist fiction* was a subsequent phenomenon, informed by *generative fiction*. After Burroughs introduced the literary world to his *Naked Lunch*, Marc Saporta, the French translator of Ernest Hemingway and Jack Kerouac (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 231), published a work titled *Composition No.1*, which I have selected, alongside the more recent *Works* by Edouard Levé, to analyse first because of its particular properties that lend the argument of this dissertation a more lucid and candid exposition, avoiding any unnecessary logical detours that would hinder, more than clarify, the reader of the present text. A disclaimer is presently required: no chronology will be exercised in this part of the dissertation, since the novels under examination will be introduced according to their presentation of the generative aspect, and not their advancement of the generative technique. In other words, the structure follows a pattern of creativity, initiating with a mathematical demonstration of the infinite generative capacity of a text, *Composition No.1*, and proceeding to a reflection on the reader's double role as *other author/original author* in Edouard Levé's *Works*. A concise enumeration of each novel's idiosyncratic exploration of the generative aspect will be presented in the conclusion to this dissertation.

If the reader, one day, were to walk into his or her personal library, choose a novel for the customary afternoon reading, and were this novel to be Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1*, s/he would verify that it opens with the following lines: "Maman is sitting on a chair beside the bed" (Saporta n.p.); the novel then closes with an ominous tone: "This, at least, is really living; war has its good side" (Saporta n.p.). A first, hypothetical perusal of the novel will disclose the preceding results. The narrative of the text is mentally organized by the reader, interpretative efforts are conducted, conclusions are drawn, the novel is put back in its place next to Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality*. Months pass, and there comes a time when the reader feels the impulse to reread Saporta's novel. The novel is enclosed in a yellow box, its one-hundred and fifty pages set loose in its red-coated interior, hence its denomination book-in-a-box. The reader, however, distracted by the prospect of revisiting an old acquaintance, stumbles on a hapless volume of Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and lets Saporta's novel plunge on the floor, its contents liberated

from the confining cell. After recovering the one-hundred and fifty pages of the novel and dusting off the unfortunate box, the reader reorganizes the contents of *Composition No.1* and sits down on the familiar armchair. An absurd incident occurs: the novel being perused is not the same novel that was read years before. It opens with the following lines: "The street files past both sides of the car" (Saporta n.p.); it now closes with these lines: "And her accent is one more distance" (Saporta n.p.). The inquisitive reader will procure an explanation to this befuddling phenomenon. There is an obvious schism between the first and the second reading, of such blatant nature that the reader even considers if s/he has reread the same novel or an entirely different book. Perhaps someone of the reader's acquaintance replaced Saporta's novel with an exact copy, albeit with an unfamiliar new text, and left the box in which the novel came enclosed intact. These would indeed be puzzling circumstances for that hypothetical reader, were Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1* not a *structurally disintegrated text*. Any text which follows the principles of Saporta's novel, that is, the principles of *structural disintegration*, will inevitably, on any given reading of the novel, yield a different outcome and produce a distinct new text. The number of permutations, or the number of possible interactions between an ordered sequence of units, on a *structurally disintegrated text* is always superior to 1. With all this in mind, one should take into account the irony in the title of Saporta's book. *Composition No.1* consists in fact of a multitude of different compositions, a *Composition No.?*, where the question mark stands for the hypothetical number of permutations allowed by the novel's structure.

Due to the permutational quality of the text, in order to calculate the number of potential fictions included in Saporta's book-in-a-box, a brief spell of mathematical reasoning is required. If one calculates the number of possible readings enclosed in Saporta's book, considering that one reads the one-hundred and fifty pages and excludes none, then one shall arrive at a telling result. First, let us attribute to the number of units available for permutation the letter *n*, and to the number of units considered at a time in each permutation the letter *k*. Then, if we consider the number of pages (units/*n*) that the novel contains, we get *n*=150. In order to read every page of the novel in any hypothetical reading of the text we would have to consider *k* to be 150 as well.[23] Thus, *k*=150. The calculation of the number of possible permutations is relatively simple. The formula necessary for this calculation is the following:

$$nPk = n! \ / \ (n\text{-}k)!$$

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[23] Note that $k \leq n$.

If we then replace the letters *n* and *r* with the numbers we calculated in the preceding paragraph, we get the following equation:

$$_{150}P_{150} = 150! \ / \ (150 - 150)!$$

Thus, the number of possible permutations encompassed by Marc Saporta's *Composition No.1* is:

$$_{150}P_{150} = 150! \ / \ (150 - 150)! = 150! \ / \ 1! = 5.71338395644586e{+}262^{[24]}$$

Hence, *Composition No.1* is not, in truth, one single, singular composition, an object of 150 pages whose borders are confidently demarcated—or else it would not be a *structurally disintegrated novel. Composition No.1* is, in actual fact, 5.71338395644586e+262 novels.[25][26] How many of these novels the reader will encounter or conceive is left to the dimension of his or her contribution as *other author.*

A question remains. What would happen if one were to read Saporta's novel and exclude a few pages? What would be the case if, for example, one were to read *Composition No.1*'s first 149 pages and disregard the last one? And what if we combined the number of possible readings with 148 pages ($_{150}P_{148}$) with the number of possible readings with 147 pages ($_{150}P_{147}$)? Or with 145 pages, excluding the remaining five? If one were to deconstruct Saporta's 150 pages into a series of novels of 149, 148, 147, 146, 145,..., and so on until we arrived at a novel with only 1 page, Saporta's novel would have not 150 pages but 11325 pages (the 150th triangular number is 11325[27]), even if very similar novels—i.e. the only difference between the novel with 150 pages and the novel with 149

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[24] If one were to write that number down in its complete form, disregarding the mathematical constant e (whose value is approximately 2.718) the number of possible permutations is in fact much more daunting: 5713383956445854590478932865261054003189553578601126418254837583317982912484539839312657448867 53 111453771078787468542041626662501986845044663559491959220665749425920957357789293253572904449624 724054167907221184454371222696755200000000000000000000000000000000000000 possible novels.

[25] Vide former footnote for a more straightforward expression of the number.

[26] The clearly complicated preceding mathematical operation could have been condensed by calculating the factorial (or the product of the integers from 1 to *n*) of 150 (150=*n*), which would be translated as 150!, a far simpler, yet deceptive, solution to the aforementioned extensive calculations. As the subsequent calculations make plain, however, it was necessary to express the formula for calculation of the number of possible permutations in order to present a clear argument and to demonstrate the overwhelming character of the number of possible readings that Saporta's novel incorporates.

[27] The formula to calculate the sum of the integers from 1 to 150 being *n*(*n*+1) / 2, then 150(150+1) / 2 = 11325, this result being the 150th triangular number.

pages would naturally be that last excluded page. The number of possible novels in Saporta's *Composition No.1* would then not be our previously calculated number (see footnote 3), but a number far too large to contain in these pages. If the reader wishes to possess a more or less accurate idea of how expansive this number is, s/he needs only to mentally calculate the sum of our previously calculated number with the number one would get if the number of pages being considered at a time were to be 148. The number of novels in this latter case is 2.856691978e+262, calculated in the following manner:

$$_{150}P_{148} = 150! \ / \ (150 - 148)! = 150! \ / \ 2! = 2.856691978e+262^{[28]}$$

The process would then have to be repeated for the remaining pages. It is plain that Saporta's novel depends on this idea of multiplicity of narratives to contest *structurally fixated fiction*, for it introduces the reader both to the possibility of multiple permuted readings, which is the foundation of *generative fiction*, and to the idea of textual exclusion, that is, the possibility to exclude one or more of the novel's parts in each reading, paradoxically producing more narratives the more chapters one excludes. Thus, one of the first *structurally disintegrated novels*, if one considers *Composition No.1* to be a single novel, encompasses already a space of fictional infinities that depends on the dialectical, active role of the reader, that is, the *other author*, to decide what parts or elements of the novel originated in the *original author* are to be selected and assimilated into the 'final' object, or the 'temporary novel' which the *other author* conceives in any given reading.

Edouard Levé's first published novel, *Works* (2002), applies the concept of fictional infinities adopted by Saporta and hyperbolizes it to an even larger infinitude. In reality, it is impossible to calculate the limits of this infinity, since Levé's novel encompasses an infinity that is impossible to translate into mathematical terms, dependent as it is on the reader's creative power to expand the textual limits of the book. Firstly, it must needs be ascertained how Levé's *Works* might be regarded as a novel. A text which is made of up of short sentences that allude to other, inexistent texts is hardly the idea of 'novel' that one carries around in the dictionary, even taking into account the phenomenon of *structural disintegration*. Yet Levé's text hints at something beyond what it is on the surface, at the sense of that which is not stated or said but that is notwithstanding

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[28] The number is significantly smaller than the preceding, yet this fact does not deter its intimidating appearance: 28566919782229272952394664326305270015947767893005632091274187916589914562422699196563287244337655572688553939373427102081333125099342252233177974597961033287471296047867889464662678645222481236202708395361059222718561134837760000000000000000000000000000000000000000.

present in the words which compose it. The text reads like a series of succinct narratives, all part of a single macro-narrative which tells of a desperate, unsuccessful author who, unable to forge the works s/he formulated in his or her head, was left only with a notebook of his or her failures as an artist. Each short chapter, or item, is a signpost that points to this condition; each short chapter, or item, conjures a world within this world which, in turn, spawns other worlds, alludes to other works. Thus, I will define Levé's *Works* as text which, in its plurality of forms, may be called a novel.

Works consists of a list of five-hundred and thirty-three suggestions which may be read in any order selected by the reader (if one reads all of the book's entries excluding none, the number of possible permutations is 533!) or read in sequence, from suggestion number 1 to suggestion number 533. Each of these suggestions consists of an idea for a novel, or a work of art, represented as a possibility of a fiction summarized in laconic sentences. The novel is a series of notions on novels or texts or artistic works that Levé "conceived but [did not bring] into being" (Levé 1).[29]

The preceding quotation is part of Levé's list, the first item, in fact, of the novel, leading one to conclude that this list of works, then, is not only a list of imagined artistic pieces but a list that may be expanded, reworked, translated into the vocabulary of any reader, adapted, shaped by the novel's *other author*, who might not be limited by the writing of his or her own list of works "conceived" but not "brought into being" (1) but may also attempt to fabricate or flesh out the propositions elaborated by Levé. Granted some of the items on the list are arguably unsuitable for textual production, perhaps being more adaptable to other artistic means, such as painting, sculpture, film. Yet that the *other author* is not limited to textual expression heightens the generative aspect of Levé's *Works*. The reader does not have to feel circumscribed either to the text or to textuality: a series of photographs may be created to produce an effect; a musical piece might be selected to communicate an impression. Number 126, by way of illustration, describes a work similar to the latter example, with a performance piece designed to explore spatiality and sound: "A piano piece is played over speakers mounted in a circle on the walls of a rotunda. With each note, the sound shifts to the next speaker" (Levé 38). In some of his other ideas, Levé makes

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[29] One feels inclined to compare Levé's *Works* to a book that was excluded from this dissertation due to its complexity as a text, which would require a substantially lengthier study to ascertain its latent *structurally disintegrated* characteristics: *The Book of Disquiet* [*Livro do Desassossego*], written by the Portuguese author Fernando Pessoa. In Jerónimo Pizarro's 2013 edition of Pessoa's book we find a composite of 445 sections of ontological wanderings, metaphysical conundrums, and epistemological quandaries, that might produce in the reader the same provocative generative effect stimulated by Levé's book. As if to confirm this affiliation between the two texts, Pessoa's book is alluded to in note 430, where Levé writes: "A portrait of Fernando Pessoa is drawn using words from his *The Book of Disquiet*. The beginnings and ends of lines mark his outline. The size, thickness, and gap between characters are used to create impressions of light and shadow" (Levé 91).

explicit the desired art form through which the idea should come into existence. While admittedly this may somewhat limit the reader's interaction with the text, it should not deter the *other author* from rethinking Levé's original concept, giving it expression in an art form other than that selected by the French author. One example of this is item number 67, which expresses Levé's intention to play with the visual arts: "Six people sit around a table. Their considerably varying sizes are determined by the number of conversations they have had with their host. Sculpture" (Levé 24).

Other items of note are number 471 ("Schopenhauer's *The Art of Being Right* is read in the tone of a televised soccer commentary." (96)), number 423 ("After watching a rotating spiral for several minutes, a man makes a drawing with the impression that the paper he is sketching on is retreating from him." (90)), number 278 ("A documentary gives the profile of a painter without any of his paintings being shown." (66)), number 104 ("A torch beam draws the outline of a man." (35)), and number 76 ("The sound of a movie theater in which a silent film is projected is played in an exhibition space. The piece is titled after the film." (25)). The variety and eclecticism of the previous examples—focussing on divers topics such as decontextualized philosophical expatiations, the influence of external phenomena in artistic creation, the relationship between criticism and art, the creative play of light and shadow, and the redefinition of an artistic piece by its audience—illustrates but a portion of Levé's novel. The creative mind will not let itself be restricted by the phrasing or the contents of these propositions, it will unearth the blind meanings behind every word, it will read and excavate in these pieces suggestions for themes, elements, characters, plots, dialogues, sequences, chapters, combinations, styles, even generic transformations, or interpret them as inverted, distorted, modified images of what Levé suggests should be produced—e.g. the Schopenhauer piece might influence the reader to write a novel that uses the German philosopher's works as dialogue exchanges between different characters in a football game. Among the *generative fictions* included in this dissertation, it is Levé's work that most challenges its reader's understanding of textuality, of generation, of interpretation. The reader of Levé's *Works* is a disquieted reader, an unsettled interpreter, a distraught creator: it must become simultaneously the *other author* of Levé's novel, but in doing so assume the role of the *original author* of his or her own *Works*. The reader will in truth take part in the concatenation of an eternity of fictional generation.

4. Stochastic Permutations: Burroughs, Ballard, Cortázar

Stochastic. Arbitrary. Random. Entropic. A novel published in 1959 by William S. Burroughs changed the history of literature. A pungent, acrid, caustic, sharp, nauseating, repugnant collection of short chapters, or short novels, or short narratives, *Naked Lunch* (as stated in one of the previous paragraphs) was one of the first *generative, structurally disintegrated novels*. While its appearance, its apparent form, is not unlike that of a *structurally fixated novel* (*conventional* or *defiant conventional*), Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* was never formally structured by its author, never given a coherent shape after its completion. It was sent to the publisher "in the order [it] was typed" (Robinson 34), thus not consciously arranged into the form it now bears. In other words, the novel which confronts the reader gives the illusion that it has been *structurally fixated*, when in fact it has not, for the text itself represents the order in which it was conceived by the author, but not necessarily the order in which it is meant to be read. To put it differently, the reader is allowed, even encouraged by Burroughs, to "cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point" (Burroughs 176) as if the novel represents a multitude of paths that intersect with each other, leaving the reader to make arbitrary decisions based on the path s/he wishes to take. The idea of the novel as an amalgam of possible paths is here put into practice. As Burroughs writes a few paragraphs later, "*Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To Book . . . How-To extend levels of experience by opening the door at the end of a long hall" (176-77). What is this door whose shadow looms over the "long hall"? Whose presence is felt in every line of Burroughs's novel? What is meant by "intersection point"? If the novel may be read "at any intersection point", then the reader might select to go through it not through a chapter-based perusal, but through a page-based one. If the reader, out of curiosity, begins reading the novel on page 61 ("like Buffalo Bill or Paul Revere or that citizen that wouldn't give up the shit, or a G.I. or a Doughboy or the unknown Soldier." (61)) and concludes it on page 127 ("He has held 23 passports and been deported 49 times - deportation proceedings pending in Cuba, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Yokohama." (127)), a seemingly incomplete reading will be produced, taking into consideration the fact that the novel concludes on page 184, excluding appendix. By indulging in this unusual reading method, the reader is already aware of the plasticity and arbitrariness not just of the novel itself but of every novel, as page numbers are shrugged off (page 61 turning into the equivalent of page 1) and the authority of the narrative and its *original author* repudiated. With this structural awareness, the reader is now able to define his or her own "intersection point[s]" and might choose the opening to the novel not to be a random chapter or page, but a paragraph. The structural deconstruction develops exponentially, and in slow steps, the

novel starts to decompose, the words on its pages melting into an insurmountable polysemic variety. Soon, the novel's "intersection point[s]" become neither chapters nor pages nor paragraphs nor words but the blank spaces in between, the germinating fictions hiding in the verbal fissures of text being concomitantly liberated.

Naked Lunch poses an unspoken question to its reader: can a text be an infinity of texts? If the reader can purposely ignore the signposts that the writer has arbitrarily placed in the novel and follow his own path, as a consequence s/he will inadvertently create a new story, tell a different tale, use the *original author*'s words to concoct his or her own narrative. Likewise, the reader may simply follow the conventional route, haphazardly organized by Burroughs, and read the book as a passive participant: in doing so, the reader will be reading the novel as it was written, accompanying, as it were, the process of creation whilst simultaneously perusing the final product. Either way, the reader will be, consciously or unconsciously, contributing to the construction of a narrative, since the novel was never *structurally fixated*, and therefore is permanently *structurally disintegrated.*

The exercise was not archived after *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs would later conduct experiments with the fold-in technique, a methodical machine to write and rewrite novels, which involved joining two different stories by folding the pages in which these were written in half, in order to create a whole new narrative. He went so far as to publish a novel, titled *Dead Fingers Talk*, that is a combination of three of his previous novels, comprising *The Nova Trilogy* (*Naked Lunch*, *The Soft Machine*, and *The Ticket That Exploded*). This compiled novel, if subjected to the same technique, would inevitably yield other narratives, which in turn would yield yet other narratives, and so forth. It is this capacity for the *original author* him or herself, alongside the reader, to become an *other author* that makes *Naked Lunch* a special case in *generative fiction*, since not only are there "many different ways for a reader to fold and weave [the narrative pieces] into an "innaresting" text arrangement or reading" (Murphy 85), the *original author* is also invited to extrapolate from his or her narrative novel meanings, alternative stories, other narrative paths. Ultimately, *Naked Lunch* suggests a reappraisal of the role of the *original author* in creating a narrative to be consumed by a passive reader. While it does not openly suggest its *structural disintegration* to its reader, its timid 'Table of Instructions' located in the book's last third, Burroughs's novel goes beyond the generative capacity of the text, beyond the infinity interwoven in its every word, beyond the structural denial of most *structurally disintegrated novels*, it questions the authority of the text itself and the verbal prerogative, that is, the authority of the words elected to produce a narrative.

The symphony of the nervous system. The exacerbation of man's fragile mental condition. The atrocity of textual spectacle. The exhibition of the inside-out self. Subtly confirming his appraisal of Burroughs's book, J. G. Ballard writes in his preface to *The Atrocity Exhibition* of the reader who peruses his book arbitrarily, stochastically, without paying heed to the guideposts set on the novel's pages to control and restrict his or her reading, and how this reader, by indulging in such a disruptive behaviour, will be accompanying the author's process of creation and follow the author's every footstep left forgotten on the very characters of the text. Given Ballard's and Burroughs's reputation for experimental, transgressive literary pieces, it should not come as a surprise that a novel which closely follows the structural approach of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* is precisely Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*. Like *Naked Lunch*, *Atrocity* is composed of short, interrelated, and yet structurally disconnected, narratives. Burroughs, who prefaced the novel's expanded and annotated edition, called it "a profound and disquieting book" (Ballard vii), an odd comment given the similarity between Burroughs's own *Naked Lunch* and *The Atrocity Exhibition*. As a *generative novel*, Ballard's book is identical to *Naked Lunch*. There is a structure, which the reader is led to believe is *structurally fixated*, with Chapters from 1 to 15, consisting of shorter subchapters with no apparent connection between them. This *structural fixation*, however, is denied at the beginning of the novel, in Ballard's "Author's Note". After addressing his concern that readers might feel intimidated by the unusual structure of the book, Ballard suggests an alternative way of reading his *Atrocity*. He writes: "Rather than start at the beginning of each chapter, as in a conventional novel, simply turn the pages until a paragraph catches your eye" (vi). *The Atrocity Exhibition* is a book of images, of still-nature photographs, of instants frozen in time. It is only adequate that the reader should approach it as such, and rearrange the structures behind these images in order to create his own portfolio of stories. Further, to return to my earlier point on the literary work as process and not product, Ballard acknowledges this power of the reader as *other author* when he states: "In effect, you will be reading the book in the way it was written" (vi). In other words, the reader will embody the *original author* and conjure up fictions to meld to the novel's vast imagery as if the reader him or herself, and not the *original author*, created that grammar of surrealist nightmares.

In a sense, *The Atrocity Exhibition* is an exercise on the unconscious, collective and individual, a study of character, or characters, which has no fixed figures to command the narrative. The identity of Travis, or Travers, or Talbot, or Traven, or Tallis, or Trabert, or Talbert, the dominant character in *Atrocity*, fluctuates like the novel's abundant micro-narratives. According to Ballard's notes, Traven's nominal profusion was inspired by the elusive author B. Traven, a writer

whom Ballard "always admired for his extreme reclusiveness" (Ballard 36). Traven's intangible identity allows the reader to author, rewrite, and refashion him in a plethora of manners, to rewrite and refashion him, to relocate the narrative to other spatial and temporal frameworks. Similarly, Ballard's obscure and abstract treatment of other elements of the novel forces the reader to make mental associations between subchapters within a chapter, subchapters between chapters, or chapters and other chapters. The novel resembles a literary game of the unconscious and incommensurable. Furthermore, as if to motivate the generative aspect of the text, the innumerable lists registered in the novel were composed not methodically but by free-association. In his annotations to chapter one, Ballard writes: "The many lists in *The Atrocity Exhibition* were produced by free association, which accounts for the repetition but, I hope, makes more sense of them" (14). In another annotation (this time to chapter nine) he brings forth an argument against the realist novel, as though he is restating the novel's detachment from previous modalities of literature: "Readers will have noticed that . . . there are almost no references to literary works. The realist novel still dominant then had exhausted itself" (139).

Like its generic sibling *Naked Lunch*, and as we will shortly see, Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* was designed to provoke instability, rejection of normativeness, and eschewal of traditional narrative forms, producing micro-narratives within a larger network of fictions that generate each other to elaborate and expatiate on the novel's liminal refusal of convention. It strips the bones and articulations of narrativity and exposes them to a reader, or *other author*, and destabilizes the process of reading by disintegrating it. In one of the author's annotations to chapter five, he writes: "Here, as throughout *The Atrocity Exhibition*, the nervous systems of the characters have been externalized, as part of the reversal of the interior and exterior worlds" (76). Characters, places, sentences, emotions, style, all follow a logic of reversal in Ballard's poetics of perversion.

A game of chalk and cement. Laughter in the dark. Permutations within permutations. One other novel, *Hopscotch*, written by Julio Cortázar, published in 1963, will be the focus of the present subchapter. *Hopscotch* is a novel that displays itself like a game, a game of ramifying fictions, of eternally-generating narratives. Right from the outset, the novel forces its reader to acknowledge the existence of at least two distinct ways to read it: the conventional path, which goes from chapter one to chapter fifty-six, and the alternative path, a sequence, predefined by Cortázar, which goes from chapter seventy-nine, moving to chapter seventy-three, followed by chapter one, and so on. The alternative path concludes with chapter one-hundred and thirty-one and chapter fifty-eight, these two alternating *ad infinitum*. By following the conventional path, the reader will consequently

leave part of the novel unread: its third part titled 'From Diverse Sides: Expendable Chapters'. In fact, Cortázar specifically writes that "the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience" (Cortázar v), not only indicating that the rest of the novel is extraneous but also suggesting that these chapters are unnecessary as well. Yet, what is more interesting in *Hopscotch* is not the fact that it is a novel that allows for different, multiple readings which, in turn, generate different, multiple fictions. This is a characteristic it shares, obviously, with all other *generative novels*. It is the fact that the novel begins by stating that it "consists of many books" (v) that makes *Hopscotch* stand out, as if Cortázar is recognizing the importance of this multiplicity of narratives embedded in one single narrative and lending it voice right at the beginning of the text. The book's initial form becomes debatable, precisely because the author tells the reader that this is not one book but "two books above all" (v). If a poetics of *structural disintegration*, whose scope would exceed the present one, were ever to be written, Cortázar's 'Table of Instructions' would have to figure in one of its earlier chapters. It is a full disclosure of the machinery behind fiction—which is created by an *original author* who, like Burroughs and Ballard, does not necessarily jot down a narrative in order and structurally organized—and a breaking down of the process of *structural disintegration*. That is to say, the novel's 'alternative path' is but one of many possible paths, but it is written down, set in the pale stone of the novel's pages, expressly defined and at hand for the casual and passive reader[30] to be educated on the limitless possibilities of fiction.

A thorough explanation of the novel's structure is provided by the figure of Morelli, an arcane character and a writer, in chapter 97, where the author, in a note of his, and while reflecting on the nature of his literary work—which operates with loose signs and unrestful significances, with images of the unconscious and the unspoken rather than the opposite—expresses his ultimate concern as an author: "[T]he true character and the only one that interests me is the reader, to the degree in which something of what I write ought to contribute to his mutation, displacement, alienation, transportation" (Cortázar 437). It seems fitting that this comment should surface in a novel which formally assumes a mutable, displaced, alienated, transported structure that, like the perfect reader of Morelli, procures in that flexibility of self the undefined unity of the opposites, the third path that sidesteps the dialectical reasoning that plagues Western thinking.

It is in Chapter 79 that Morelli makes manifest his intention to create a text which "would not clutch the reader but which would oblige him to become an accomplice", a novel that is "out of line, untied, incongruous, minutely antinovelistic (although not antinovelish)" and, unlike its

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[30] Or female-reader; see chapter 79 and 99.

ancestors (ergo the conventional novels tied to tradition that are nothing more than "content in a closed order") a novel in which the author would find "an opening and therefore cut the roots of all systematic construction of characters and situations" (Cortázar 396). Yet Morelli admits that "[a]n attempt of this type" is derived from "a rejection of literature", one which refuses the seclusion of the author as intangible and the reader as passive (or female-reader). The reader, the Mallarmean '*mon semblable*', is metamorphosed into "coparticipant and cosufferer of the experience through which the novelist [passes], *at the same moment and in the same form*" (397). Thus, Morelli writes that "[w]hat the author . . . might have succeeded in for himself, will be repeated . . . in the reader-accomplice" (398). Cortázar, in the words of Morelli, is evidently hinting at the required existence of the *other author* as part of the process of creation of a *structurally disintegrated novel*. In a later note, Morelli refers to the reader as the architect that makes sense of a narrative of loose pictures and events, filling in the spaces between each narrative and creating a meaning of his or her own: "The bridges between one and another instant in those lives which were so vague and so little characterized would have to be presumed or invented by the reader" (468). Morelli concludes, using a simile with Gestaltian psychology, that it is in the spaces left for the arbitrary judgement of the reader that, in the end, one finds imbued the significance of the text, for the reader may conceive the sense that, if not present in the "vague" and "little characterized" textual instances, nonetheless pervades the novel: "[S]ometimes the missing lines were the most important ones, the only ones that really counted" (469). Thus, the novel exists in the inferences made by the reader and not in the expatiations of the author. The consequence is blatant: if Morelli's theory is applied to *Hopscotch*, then the novel is written by the *other author* and only implied by the *original author*.

Sempiternal narratives that occur in the background of another narrative, or that which is subliminal possessing more relevance and more information that the liminal counterpart (cf. Chapter 62): these are the underlying principles of *Hopscotch*, the hidden textualities beneath the great narrative of Horacio Oliveira and his *affaire de coeur* with La Maga. Take chapter 74, for example, in which Morelli muses on his doubled nature, that relishes "in the trivial, in the puerile, in a piece of string or in a Stan Getz solo", which to him is not "a lamentable impoverishment", and yet finds himself also close to "a *summa* that denies itself and goes threading off and hiding" (Cortázar 386). This twofold ideology is evidence of the novel's constant preoccupation with unification of principles, universal coherence, and the coexistence of conflicting narratives within the same system. Morelli, whom Cortázar insinuates is behind the writing of *Hopscotch*, who gives voice to most of the novel's concerns, is the personified epitome of the chaos and order that are seemingly at odds and whose voices Oliveira tries to harmonize. He forces himself to reinvent

language by producing complicated passages, the "archapters" or "chaptypes" (431), that have apparently no meaning but that may enclose in them a plurality of interpretations: in this plurality may lie the universal cohesion that language by itself is unable to seize, a mirror of the *structurally disintegrated* state.

All things considered, the epic metaphysical quest that is *Hopscotch*, interlaced with the large scope of its permutational nature (155! permutations or, if one follows the principles exercised in the analysis of Saporta's text, a much more substantial number), form a concatenation of textual negativity, that is, an object which negates itself by producing and inflecting on its parts an absolute disintegration, that nullifies any effect that structural rigour might have imposed. The novel of ideas, the *roman-à-thèse*, is transformed into a labyrinth of permuted philosophies:

> MORELLIANA
>
> If the volume or the tone of the work can lead one to believe that the author is attempting a sum, hasten to point out to him that he is face to face with the opposite attempt, that of an implacable *subtraction*. (Cortázar 526)

The "*subtraction*" introduced here by Morelli is one of meaning, for if there is no unified whole, no authoritative version of the text, and if the novel is but the sum of its parts, which in the case of Cortázar's novel implies a sum of its permuted fictions, then there is a *subtraction*, or a ubiquitous negation, of unity and absolute sense. Cortázar seems to be hinting at the central flaw of *structural disintegration*: that it entails also an absolute negation of aesthetic uniformity, that it peels off its homogeneous nature for a heterogeneous indefiniteness.

5. Hidden Narratives: Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*

Imagine a book of marvellous stories, forgotten in one of the many shelves of a tall bookcase, within a cavernous library, somewhere in the centre of a crone-like European city. Imagine a book that, once opened, divests itself of all the words imprinted on it, leaving but a few scattered behind. In place of these flying words, one finds holes, empty windows that allow one to look at the pages which once hid behind the fleet text. This book is *Tree of Codes*, a novel conceived by Jonathan Safran Foer. *Tree of Codes* is an interesting *generative novel* because it is a novel about gaps and lacunae,

a possible novel which generates possible fictions, already the product of a reinvention, of a fiction branching off into other fictions. The novel is an adaptation of Bruno Schulz's *Sklepy Cynamonowe* (1934),[31] using Celina Wieniewska's translation instead of Schulz's original. By adaptation of the text it is meant that Foer cut and removed most of the words in Schulz's short-story collection, leaving empty spaces in their stead, spaces of missing narrative, a narrative that, by virtue of its absence, contributes to the creation of another narrative. These empty gaps perform a double role: on the one hand, they are suggestive of windows which open up to other layers of the physical text, therefore creating a narrative that derives from itself; on the other hand, they are spaces meant to be occupied by the reader, an invitation to a literal rewriting of the novel. In other words, the book is not only dependent on the reader/*other author*, it is also dependent on an *original author*. The reader, thus, must actively play the part of both *original* and *other author*. More interestingly, Foer, an avid reader of Schulz, deepens the relationship between reader and text, since the book is generated from Schulz's short-story collection. The reader, then, performs the role of *original author* and of double-*other author*, since his work as *other author* builds up on material from Foer's *Tree of Codes*, which in turn builds up on material from Schulz's *Sklepy Cynamonowe*.

The novel begins with an empty page, Schulz's first page having been entirely crossed out. The following page represents the opening of Foer's novel, suggesting that Foer is, as it were, turning the page on Schulz's book and beginning his novel narrative afresh. Foer, the *other author*, is here visually performing *structural disintegration*, by dismissing the authoritative voice of the author's first words, first page, first paragraph, and beginning his narrative instead with a few select words from the novel's second page. The voice of the *original author* is all but silent in the initial pages of the text. This performance of *structural disintegration*, which involves complicity with the reader, aware as s/he is of the mechanics of Foer's text, allows for a demonstration of the reader's power over the *original author*'s text. Further, the obvious presence of holes in the narrative hints at the arbitrary relationship between author/reader, for it materializes the missing narrative of Schulz and ironically gives voice, by muting said voice, to the *original author*'s text. That is to say, Foer's intentionally chosen words, his concocted stolen narrative, formulate but one of the numerous narrative possibilities still attached to Schulz's book.[32] Were Foer to remove these holes, the

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[31] *The Street of Crocodiles*, in English.

[32] Cf. *Of One Woman or So*, a book written by the artist Kabe Wilson under the pen name Olivia N'Gowfri, using only the words of Virginia Woolf's 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*. Contrary to Foer's book, Wilson's text enacts its link to Woolf's essay not with holes in the text but with a collage of words cut directly from a copy of *A Room*. Punctuated and capitalized by Wilson, the book/collage is a testimony to the collaboration (unintended on Woolf's part) between the two artists, demonstrating how fiction allows for a reconstruction and re-assimilation of its parts into multiple cohesive texts (Wilson, "Of One Woman or So").

generative power of the text would be lessened, for the reader would not be faced with the materialization of the *original author*'s silence. The unstated, embodied by the holes in *Tree of Codes*, highlights the spaces of generative nature that were disregarded by Foer. In other words, the other narratives that were left behind, locked up within the system of Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*:

> The passersby [hole] had their eyes half-closed [hole] . [hole] Everyone [hole] wore [hole] his [hole] mask [hole] . [hole] children [hole] greeted each other with [hole] masks [hole] painted on their faces [hole] ; they smiled at each other's [hole] smiles [hole] growing in this emptiness, [hole] wanting to [hole] resemble [hole] the [hole] reflections [hole] , [hole] whole generations [hole] had [hole] fallen asleep [hole]. (Foer, *Tree* 8-9)[33]

Absence of fiction, once materialized, plays up the presence of generative power in textuality. Fiction, which in other *generative novels*, as we have seen, generates and produces by excess, be it of chapters, micro-narratives, or permutations, combines, in *Tree of Codes*, the virtue of generation, infinite and insurmountable, with that of understatement. Fiction generates also by exiguity.

It is undeniable that the holes in *Tree of Codes*'s narrative are the source of several interpretations. In the previous paragraphs, I have offered some explanations for their presence, but one should also account for the visual power that Foer's holes leave in the finished product. As an object of art, it is a statement that does not need to be perused to transpire the principles of *generative fiction*. To a casual observer, it will be immediate the conclusion that Foer's *other-authorial* powers supplant the authority of Schulz's *original author* status. The author is deposed, both interpretatively and visually. In his "*Author's Afterword*: This Book and The Book", Foer offers some words regarding the creative process behind *Tree of Codes*. He elaborates on his relationship to Schulz's *Street of Crocodiles*, calling *Tree of Codes* a "small response to that [Schulz's] great book" (Foer, *Afterword* 139) and shedding some light on the destructive power of *generative fiction*, which erases one author's work, the *original*, and replaces it with the *other author*'s ramified fiction. In this case,

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[33] I have indicated Foer's deliberately carved holes by placing the word *hole* in between square brackets, so as to suggest to the reader the visual presentation of *Tree of Codes*. The 'holeless' text would thus read: "The passersby had their eyes half-closed. Everyone wore his mask. children greeted each other with masks painted on their faces; they smiled at each other's smiles growing in this emptiness, wanting to resemble the reflections, whole generations had fallen asleep" (Foer, *Tree* 8-9). To contextualize the first two words, "The passersby", one would have to recur to Tree's source text, the first of Schulz's short-stories, "August": "On Saturday afternoons I used to go for a walk with my mother. From the dusk of the hallway, we stepped at once into the brightness of the day. *The passersby*, bathed in melted gold, had their eyes half-closed against the glare, as if they were drenched with honey" (Schulz 4; my emphasis).

Foer, as both *original* and *other author*, confesses that his rewriting of the beloved book by Schulz gave him the impression of an execrating blasphemy or an unconscious dictation of a book's hallucination: "At times I felt that I was making a gravestone rubbing of *The Street of Crocodiles*, and at times that I was transcribing a dream that *The Street of Crocodiles* might have had" (139). He further suggests, as *other author*, that Schulz, the *original author*, wrote *Street of Crocodiles* by disinterring it from yet another book, becoming himself an *other author* of an undisclosed, unknown other book, producing thus a chain of *originals* and *others* which interdependently sustain fiction and bear witness to its generative competence. Foer notes, "I could not help but feel that Schulz's hand must have been forced, that there must have existed some yet larger book from which *Street of Crocodiles* was taken" (139).

Hence, holes: filling in the blank spaces; stating the reader's puissance and control over the *original author*'s text; dethroning the novel and crowning the generative power of fiction. Yet the holes are capable also of producing narratives within Foer's selected words. While in most pages the jumbled up text produces nonsensical readings (in the first page the holes create a strange proem, "bri hoar ss back rising and fall thei mother and I a wanting to."[34][35] (Foer, *Tree* 7)), oftentimes there are instances where the holes make manifest other possible narratives, roads not taken by Foer but revelled in by the reader. Passages with the poetic nature of page 67, "Something stirred in time yesterday" or "against the blind darkness"[36] (67), or the surrealist qualities of page 87, "The cartographer the city rose toward the spared our city center of the map" or "passivity presence of mother, secret"[37] (87), evince this characteristic of the holed narrative created by Foer. The reader indulges in several readings of the text and contributes to its enrichment by producing imaginary holes in his or her mind that erase or cover up Foer's text and replace it with the covert links that bind up and entangle Schulz's words.

Thus *Tree of Codes* is not only a novel that performs the generative aspect of *structural disintegration*, exposing the *other author* as *original author* and deleting the *original author* and replacing him with gaping holes, it makes the reader a doubled-*other author* that permutes the words of an

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[34] Or, with the holes marked out: "bri hoar [hole] ss [hole] back rising and fall [hole] thei [hole] mother and I a [hole] wanting to [hole] . " (Foer, *Tree* 7).

[35] Given Schulz's untimely demise at the hands of a Gestapo officer, it is certainly curious that the book's third word is precisely "ss". This curious coincidence may be indicative of deliberateness in the positioning of the holes.

[36] Or, with the holes marked out: "Something stirred in [hole] time [hole] yesterday" and "against the blind [hole] darkness" (Foer, *Tree* 67).

[37] Again, with the holes marked out: ""The cartographer [hole] the city rose [hole] toward the [hole] spared our city [hole] center of the map" or "passivity [hole] presence of [hole] mother, [hole] secret" (Foer, *Tree* 87).

already *other author*, in turn derived from an *original author*. It suggests not only a filling in of the spaces left by Foer, it restates the tradition epitomized by Ballard, Burroughs, Cortázar, Johnson, Saporta, et al., of the permutational qualities of literature, and thus, in managing both generative characteristics at once, of rewriting and letting itself be rewritten, *Tree of Codes* stands out as a key *generative, structurally disintegrated novel*, the holes in its plot evocative of the presence, not the absence, of a multitudinous text behind the incarnadine authority of the original work.

6. Milorad Pavić: Three Novels Against Mortality

The focus of this subchapter is Milorad Pavić, the conspicuous beacon of *generative fiction*. His works: *Dictionary of the Khazars. Landscape Painted with Tea. Last Love in Constantinople.* Three novels that stand against mortality. Three novels that reject the unbreakable order of a closed structural system. Three novels that rejoice in the inexorable rewriting of their bodies. Order and narrative imply both a beginning and ending, that is, a structural mortality. Pavić's narratives are assumedly *disintegrated* and repel *structurally fixated novels* for these exist "like life, from beginning to end, from birth to death[.]" (Pavić, *Landscape* 186), and are thus utterly incompatible with Pavić and his novels. As Angela Carter points out, "[h]e wants to disrupt time, to challenge death" (Carter 607). And for Pavić to combat mortality one needs only to exhume the generative aspect out of the text itself and disintegrate the structure of one's novels.

To begin with *Dictionary of the Khazars: A Lexicon Novel in 100.000 Words*, a novel first published in 1984, a lexicographer's reverie that revels in the revolutionary structural (dis)order provoked by the revolting rearrangements of its parts. The notice on the frontispiece warns the distracted reader that there are two versions of Pavić's novel in the market. In bold, italic lettering it states, "*This is the MALE EDITION of the Dictionary. The FEMALE edition is almost identical. But NOT quite. Be warned that ONE PARAGRAPH is crucially different. The choice is yours*" (Pavić, *Dictionary* [v]). At the outset of the novel, in the very frontispiece of the "Lexicon Cosri" ([vii]), the reader is warned that a choice must be made regarding the purchasing of the *Dictionary*. If s/he acquires one version of the novel, another one will be ignored. To read one version of the text is to turn a blind eye to the other. In the reverse page, another notice may alarm the distracted reader. There it is stated, "Here lies the reader / who will never open this book. / He is here forever dead" ([vi]). The opening of the novel has already twice drawn the attention of its reader, ingenuously giving prominence to the reader's role in the *Dictionary*. In the novel's "Preliminary Notes", it is claimed that the structural haphazardness of the *Dictionary* is owed to its lexicographical nature. Declaring

its indisputable inspiration in "the Daubmannus edition" of the *Dictionary*, it is stated that "[l]ike that one [the Daubmannus edition], it [this edition] can be read in an infinite number of ways" (11). The *other author* is entitled then to read in this version of the *Dictionary* a reflection of the Daubmannus one, as if the *original author* was but trying to recreate too a mirror-image of that book, becoming himself an *other author*. Yet, in an interesting turn of the screw, the lexicographer's following notes further complicate this recreation of a lost text. He additionally states that the *Dictionary* "is an open book, and when it is shut it can be added to: just as it has its own former and present lexicographer, so it can acquire new writers, compilers, and continuers" (11). In this sense, not only is the reader an active contributor to the recreation of an edition that has been devoured by the lascivious mouth of time, s/he is also an active contributor to the enlargement of the *Dictionary's* corpus. This open invitation, glaringly suggesting the appearance of an *other author*, offers Pavić the opportunity to eschew a sense of unity and, instead, give the novel a sense of incompleteness. Without the reader, he appears to suggest, there is no text. Pavić thus attributes to the reader the sword of meaning, that s/he may transpierce the novel with it and solidify its significance, if only for the duration of one's reading. On a prototypical 'Table of Instructions', Pavić writes:

> [T]he reader can use the books as he sees fit. As with any other lexicon, some will look up a word or a name that interests them at the given moment, whereas others may look at the book as a text meant to be read in its entirety, from beginning to end, in one sitting, so as to gain a complete picture of the Khazar question and the people, issues, and events connected with it. The book's pages can be turned from left to right or from right to left, as were those of the Prussian edition (Hebrew and Arab sources). The three books of this dictionary . . . can be read in any order the reader desires; he may start with the book that falls open as he picks up the dictionary. (Pavić, *Dictionary* 12)

Later in the aforementioned "Preliminary Notes", Pavić begins playing with metaphors of reading, capering with imagery evoked by surrealist juxtapositions, similes such as the table-manners analogy, "he can use his right eye as a fork, his left as a knife, and toss the bones over the shoulder", or the ornithological allusion, "he will read it like the buzzard that flies only on Thursdays", or even the ludic comparison, "he can rearrange it in an infinite number of ways, like a Rubik cube"

(Pavić, *Dictionary* 13). This conjured up imagery and symbolism are designed to make Pavić's *Dictionary* encompass a complete macro-narrative universe that englobes not only historical and philological concerns but also scatological and entomological preoccupations. In the end, the reader will "get out of this dictionary as much as he puts into it" (13), meaning that the novel can only exist and subsist within the reader's authorial imagination, capable of summoning an immortality in textuality if such be his or her desire.

At the other end of the spectrum of *generative fiction* lies *Landscape Painted with Tea*. Pavić's concern with this novel is literature and its potentiality as a game, and not as a grammar of the universe. In doing so, he surreptitiously includes himself in an imaginary literary group which among others embraces Calvino, Cortázar, and Perec. The first part of the novel, Book One, is disguised as an individual novelette, titled "A Little Night Novel", linearly composed and structurally fixated. The second part of *Landscape* is written in the shape of a crossword puzzle, creating "an effect of intentional randomness" (Carter 607), as it is the reader who engineers the plot of the novel and the order in which it is read.[38] The twofold 'Table of Contents' of this second part, Book Two, or "A Novel For Crossword Fans", illustrates, on the one hand, the path to be followed if the reader "wish[es] to read this novel, or crossword, across", that is to say, in a linear fashion, following "the one-way street" (Pavić, *Landscape* 188), while, on the other hand, it demonstrates the path to be followed if the reader "wish[es] to read this novel, or crossword, down" (100-01) that is to say, following an alternative logic that makes the reader peruse the text from page 119 to page 124, from page 185 to page 192, from page 320 to page 324, et cetera. This method of reading is part of Pavić's plan to formulate "a new way of reading", an education of his readership, since "just as there are talented and untalented writers, so there are gifted and ungifted readers" (186). One may assume that Pavić is here assessing his reader's passivity, or lack thereof, in order to anoint him or her with the title of *other author*. The gifted reader is capable of continuing Pavić's legacy, whilst the ungifted one is not so fortunate.

Yet, "since the solution of a crossword never lies in the crossword itself" (Pavić, *Landscape* 188) and given the fact that, as stated, the second part of *Landscape* is rendered as a literary crossword, the reader is invited, at the end of the novel, to come up with his or her own idea for a suitable denouement. The gifted reader, aptly chosen by Pavić to perform his or task, will certainly concur and concede his or her own authorial voice to the text. The ungifted reader will passively dismiss Pavić's modest proposal and pass it off as a metafictional, ironical, postmodern joke. Thus,

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[38] One should read the book "not in order of succession and across (as the river flows) but down, as the rain falls" (Pavić, *Landscape* 186).

in the "[*s*]*pace left for the reader to write the denouement of the novel or the solution to this crossword*" (341) there will be a void left behind, an immortality ignored, a solution sidestepped. The device, notwithstanding, in the system of *structural disintegration* and *generative fiction*, stands out particularly as it directly addresses the reader and requests his or her assistance to the conclusion of the text. Once more, like in the *Dictionary*, without the reader, the text is but a gathering of sentences and words. As the *original author* steps out and leaves both the order of the novel's second part and its denouement up to the *other author*'s literary capacity, who is "gripping [his/her] pencil as a mother does a spoon or a murderer a knife" (342), the immortality of this *Landscape* is restated and reassured, for the novel that is left unfinished may stand the test of time being the object of the readerly game of speculation. Other novels that were unintentionally left incomplete—to wit, Saramago's *Alabardas* (2014), Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* (2008), Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* (2009), Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), et cetera—suffer the same fate of Pavić's *Landscape Painted with Tea*, marooning in a sea of conjectural hypotheses, perpetuated by their lack of conclusion, immortalized by their stillbirth nature.

Last Love in Constantinople is the title of Pavić's third novel to be considered in this dissertation, subtitled *A Tarot novel for divination*. Like Pavić's other novels, it offers a 'Table of Instructions' to the inquisitive reader, who will not dismiss it as one does a list of acknowledgments or a lengthy epigraph. It is titled "To Use the Book for Divination" and it elucidates the reader on how to use *Last Love* as a pack of Tarot cards and see his or her future.[39] It begins by stating, rather scornfully, "You may read the novel in sequence" (Pavić, *Last Love* 6). It then presents an alternative perusal, one which follows one of the three patterns described in the novel's Appendix 1 and that allows the reader to go through the novel "in the sequence suggested by the Tarot" (6). According to Pavić, by using this method of reading, trusting the arbitrary decisions of a random shuffling of Tarot cards, the reader will access "the possibility of divination or fortune-telling", strengthening beforehand the relationship between reader and text. It is asking the reader to become a fortune-teller, metaphor for *other author*, able to see into the future ramification of multiple fictions, using a simple deck of twenty-two cards, or chapters, that will, reorganized and shuffled, provide distinct narratives formulated initially by their designer, the *original author*. The analogy is further continued. After anatomizing the procedure of Tarot reading, Pavić clarifies how the reader is meant to interpret the cards:

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[39] The novel includes, in its last four pages, a detachable set of 22 Tarot cards, with all the Major Arcana, from The Fool to The World.

An interpretation of each card may be found at the end of the book in
Appendix 2. The corresponding book chapter further explains the card.
You can read this yourself or have it read to you. (Pavić, *Last Love* 6)

In other words, fortune-telling in *Last Love* is not dependent on the largest section of the novel, where most of its fictions are contained. The *other author*, querent, or reader, may choose to read only the interpretation of the cards offered in Appendix 2 and build his or her own fictions from that interpretative exercise. The *original author*, in this case, contributes only to the elaboration of the premises of this ramified fiction. Yet Pavić further complicates the relationship between author and reader, *original author* and *other author*, by adding an extra reader to the equation. Should the reader so desire, an other reader will draw, shuffle, annotate, and interpret the cards for them, the former reader becoming an *other other author* to the *other author*, distant from the *original author* in the sense that it is twice removed from his creation: firstly, because his or her reading are already the product of an interpretative, generative exercise produced by the *other author*, the latter reader, and secondly, because his or her reading regards the *other author*'s work as the original work, therefore excluding the *original author* from the equation. This may only be averted if the second reader depends only on the interpretative and generative suggestions of the *original author*, where the relationship returns to the principles of *generative fiction*, the dialectical clash author/reader solved by their respective transformation into *original* and *other author*.

The number of possible readings of the novel's twenty-two chapters is noticeably larger than Saporta's *Composition No.1*, given the three suggested Tarot spreads and the aforementioned linear reading. One of these readings/spreads is titled "The Magic Cross" and, should the reader use it, s/he would be required to choose five cards/chapters and lay them out in a cross-like fashion, with the first card/chapter on the left, the second on the right, the third on the top, the fourth on the bottom, and the fifth one in the centre of the cross. Pavić calls this spread "[t]he simplest layout in the Tarot" (Pavić, *Last Love* 164). Another reading/spread is titled "The Celtic Cross" and requires a more complicated exercise on the part of the reader, who must randomly choose ten cards and place them according to the layout illustrated on the page. This spread is dependent on the *original author*'s communication with the *other author*, since "[t]he tenth card represents the advice of the fortune teller" to the reader, the fortune teller representing here the author of the book (165). The final reading/spread is titled "The Great Triad" and the number of cards to be chosen is nine, where "[t]he first three cards refer to the past, the next three to the present and the last three to the future" (166), thus providing the *other author* with temporal

indications, or a sketched chronology, so that his or her ramified narrative may depend, at least, on the *original author*'s idea of time. With these three spreads and with the list of interpretations supplied in Appendix 2, the *other author* is given the utensils that are required for the production of a fiction of infinitude. Either dependent on the novel's text, that is, on the twenty-two chapters of the novel, or dependent only on the interpretative faculty of the *other author*, Pavić's *Last Love* prevails over the morbid tension of an imposed *structural fixation*. It goes beyond the generative aspect of its textuality and fiction by offering the reader the ability to conceive a narrative based only on the archetypes of the Tarot, to produce a story out of images and symbols that not only derives from another narrative produced by an *original author*, but is also the textual branching of a series of archetypal descriptions, pithy suggestions conceived by the *original author* but open to fictional expansion. As an example of the latter, take The Empress's description in Appendix 2 and imagine the numerous narrative possibilities it offers to the inquisitive reader, or *other author*: "Right side up: Fertility, femininity, material wealth, inheritance of real estate" or "Reversed: Rash behaviour, slump in business. Lost illusions. Exhaustion" (168).

Since a *structurally fixated novel* is by definition immutable, and because its *conventional* or *defiant conventional* form is independent of the reader's generative capability, *structural fixation* represents, to Pavić, an impossibility of immortality, an impediment to fiction's generative expansion, an obstacle to the creation of novel literatures. Pavić 's view of literature is profoundly at variance with *structural fixation*. As a writer, he sought to create the novel which embraced a profusion of narratives, a novel that never exhausted itself: "[A]ny new way of reading that goes against the matrix of time, which pulls us towards death, is a futile, but honest effort to resist this inexorability of one's fate" (Pavić, *Landscape* 186). In Pavić's work, the generative aspect not only intended to make one narrative expand into many other narratives, but it also relied on that expansion to subsist and resist the inevitable mortality of the novel's *original author*, replaced, as it is, by the *other author*. This is corroborated by his desire, expressed in the introduction to the *Dictionary*, that the reader would not passively consume the work he or she was presented with but would contribute to it with his or her own lexical entries. In the same manner, the final pages of *Landscape* make manifest the same sentiment, with their direct invitation for the reader to conclude the novel's denouement by writing his or her own version of the ending. Likewise*, Last Love* provides its reader with a set of twenty-two tarot cards so that s/he may never feel that the novel has surpassed exhaustion and has become limited within its structural system.

The *original author*, thus humbled by his or her own mortality, passes on to the countless *other authors* reading his or her words, the authorial quill, that it may lend him or her the capacity to

give the novel what its author could not: endless expansion. The ineluctable proliferation of fictions, derived from the three novels' generative aspect, relies on the same fictional infinitude which allured authors like Saporta and Cortázar, yet more than simply being a machine of narratives, that is, purely expansionist, Pavić's novels, within their limitative structural system, lead their reader through a maze of literary landscapes, be it lexicographic, ludological, or divinatory, into the heart of fiction itself, and invite him or her to go beyond the text, to move beyond the written word, and to originate other narratives that, tied to Pavić's own, perpetuate them beyond the despicable mortality of he who brought them to life.

7. Theory and the Labyrinth: *House of Leaves*, *Kapow!*, *S.*

A labyrinth is a series of interlocked corridors that shepherds one who gets lost in its fissuring paths either to a crowning and wreathed victory or to a most intolerable death. The inquisitive reader who chooses to enter the labyrinths of *House of Leaves*, *Kapow!*, and *S.* would be wise to ration his or her wits and use them only when a confident turn is to be made or a resolute conclusion to be drawn. These twisting, interweaving novels more often than not lead an unwary reader off his or her path, into shadowed alleys, deserted avenues, dead-end streets. They are labyrinths with multiple exits, but also literary gaols to which a less respectful reader is sentenced. A disclaimer is due, before we proceed: it is challenging to emulate in these pages the formal presentation of these three novels, especially Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, since their typographical ornateness is far too extravagant to be translated and preserve the cohesion of the text. For that reason, I have decided to merely describe some of the examples I have chosen, instead of, as with Foer's *Tree of Codes*, burdening myself with the insufferable task of transcribing them with accuracy.

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is a novel about a book about a book about a documentary about a house. Trapped between layers upon layers of fiction, *House of Leaves* is a *generative novel* in the sense that it invites not only multiple readings, but false readings, futile readings, expendable readings, incarcerating readings, fruitless readings, limited readings, unrewarding readings, barren readings, pointless readings, directionless readings, readings which imprison the reader in a literary maze within a maze. The novel has three main plots which, in turn, branch off into other secondary plots: Johnny Truant's account, the compiler of *The Navidson Record*, narrated in the first-person in the novel's footnotes; Zampanò's study of *The Navidson Record*, homonymously titled, written in a stoic, academic style, annotated by Truant and the Editors of the book; *The Navidson Record*, an autobiographical documentary about a house that is bigger on the

inside than on the outside, indirectly narrated by Zampanò in his study of the film. Springing from these three main narratives are elements which the reader may or may not read: extensive footnotes written by Truant, Zampanò, and the book's fictional Editors; Daedelian lists of architects, buildings, construction materials, filmmakers, literary 'haunted-house tales', et cetera; countless appendixes with extra material, including documents seemingly unrelated to the three main narratives, such as "Outlines & Chapter Titles", a "Letter to the Editor", "Poems", "Sketches & Polaroids", an assortment of "Collages", an "Obituary", and an extensive list of "Various Quotes"; it includes also other ephemera such as an exhaustive index of keywords that surfaced throughout the novel. This gargantuan collection of different narratives, different texts, different fictions is suggestive of a text, like Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, which recognizes the generative aspect in fiction, and which contributes to the creation of other supplementary fictions.

The reader of Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is required, at the beginning of the novel, to decide which path s/he will take in the labyrinth of words prepared by the *original author*. Once the path has been chosen, the reader dresses the cowl of *other author*, and begins preparing a narrative based on contingent choices. Each reading of the text represents a different incursion on the labyrinth and, given the number of possible paths offered by the novel, the reader will be in possession of a considerable quantity of available narratives. Furthermore, as *other author*, the reader represents the elected editor of the text who will produce a definitive version of the novel, one either containing only Truant's footnotes, or Zampanò's essay, or just the collection of poems offered as an appendix, titled "The Pelican Poems", in this case turning the narrative of *House of Leaves* into a poetry anthology. Thus, the *original author* supplies a wide variety of texts that the *other author* will then reorganize and edit, until the definitive version of the text is ascertained. The many paths available to the reader, however, often lead this *other author* to back alleys whence there is no way out. In Chapter IX, for example, the reader is faced with a persistent typographical experimental layout, which constructs textual barriers around the narrative to impede the reader from exiting the labyrinth. Concocted using lists of architectural achievements, names of renowned documentary filmmakers, constructional utensils, et cetera, these textual paths create, rather than obliterate, new narratives, new fictions, ramified novels that are glossed over by the heaps of tributary fictions. Instead of imprisoning, these textual walls may in truth liberate the reader from the authority of the *original author*'s text, by making use of its restrictive barriers to pole-vault over the hindrances of textuality. The typographical gaol hence becomes a clean slate for the *other author* to write, or narrate, his or her egress off the text. To write oneself out.

As the generative aspect of the novel resides in the *other author*'s editorial decisions, the reader is also tacitly ordained to contribute to the novel with his or her own fictional digressions. An example of this authorial anointment is "The Song of Quesada and Molino", Appendix E, a poem which is introduced in Chapter IX and to which the reader is directed in the aforementioned chapter by Zampanò ("I include it here in its entirety" (Danielewski 137)), but which according to the novel's Editors is "Missing" (556). It is the reader, or *other author*, who must then complete Quesada and Molino's literary journey and fill the lacunae left by Truant, Zampanò, or the novel's Editors. These open-ended sections of the novel give the impression of a text yet to be completed, a text that is, of necessity, always expanding, ramifying, transforming, metamorphosing. Incarcerating. Indeed, like the diagram of the great mythological tree Yggdrasil provided at the end of the novel, *House of Leaves* is a work-in-progress, a house of fiction that is bigger on the inside, that is, textually and typographically speaking, where the limitations of its physicality give the illusion of finality and conclusiveness. In fact, the reader who enters this house of mirrors and falls down its staircased labyrinths might soon discover for him or herself that the narrative the *original author* devised is but a literary entrance to what remains to be written, the endless corridors of fictions that were left abandoned, to be told by an inquisitive *other author*.

With a similar effect on his mind, Adam Thirlwell, a British author, known for his novels *Politics* (2003) and *The Escape* (2009), devised *Kapow!*, a literary work which also borrows documentary filmmaking (like *House of Leaves*) to contrive a narrative that is not limited to the textual presentation. That is to say, like a documentary chooses to portray a perspective of an event or character, so *Kapow!* depicts a narrative through a specific lens, one that could have been represented differently, written using different words, recurring to a different language. *Kapow!* poses significant questions regarding the nature of fiction, for it materializes a possible fiction of a real event, the Arab Spring, and offers the reader an insight on the lives of its assumedly invented characters. This fictional invasion of factual History attempts to chart a veritable portrayal of the revolution, a scientific understanding of the revolutionary heart, without seeking the endless expansion of factual information, where one source leads to another, successively leading to yet another, and so forth. And yet, as Thirlwell verifies, an attempt to incorporate fiction in History yields similar results. Early in the novel, the narrator of *Kapow!* writes, "my idea of integrity . . . meant that you had to follow every thought as far as you could, into all the sad dead ends" (Thirlwell 18). The culmination of folded pages in the novel's climax signifies, precisely, that these "dead ends" are utopian in nature, since every deviation of an account leads only to further deviations. Thirlwell's invented characters, Ahmad, Mouloud, Rustam, Nigora, Aziza, et al., wax into organic

figures, begin to make decisions that are not in the control of the *original author*. Their expansion is emulated by the novel's enfolding and spreading out pages, where deviations of the main narrative path are offered. These are marked in the text by a special sign which indicates a ramification of the path. The reader may consciously ignore these.

The *other author*, faced with Thirlwell's work, will at first be charged with an organization of the novel, with a fixation of the text that nonetheless must not *structurally fixate* it. As the fictional digressions cut into the text itself, interrupt whole paragraphs, defy the formal presentation of the novel, the *other author* does battle with them, choosing which are necessary and which are superfluous. At a certain point, the *other author* may realize that these digressions might, in fact, withhold the central narrative of *Kapow!* and that the superficial, dominant narrative path might in fact be no more than a tremendous deviation of the text's narrative nucleus. Once the *other author* realizes this, the labyrinth collapses and crumbles, and the narrative the *original author* configured is at the mercy of the *other author*. As in *House of Leaves*, it is the restrictive, structurally uniform textual labyrinth that liberates the text and evinces the generative aspect of the novel.

At an early stage in the narrative, the narrator of *Kapow!* writes, "Let's say that I just cherished this idea of writing something that would keep unfolding out of itself, a story that would take in as many other stories as possible" (Thirlwell 19). The *other author* is entitled then to the supervision of this construction, of this process of unfolding, helping the *original author* convey his message by the expansion of the fictions by him generated. As we have seen, this can only be done by allowing these original, generated fictions to generate other fictions in turn. This succession of fictions may then document a diversity of experiences, infinitely integrated into a finite event such as the Arab Spring. Coalescing a multitude of experiences and thoughts and fictions and facts into a unified infinity is theoretically impossible: the novel would have to condensate that infinity into a finite number of words, thus rendering its unified vision into an abridged version of said unity. This act alone would demonstrate the fallacious nature of Thirlwell's textual experiment. Thus, when the narrator writes that his wish as *original author* is to create a new modality of writing, he is implying that such modality would necessitate a new modality of reading. We return to the neverending cycle of *generative fiction*: a *generative text* is written and rewritten innumerable times, so that the *original author* who conceives it first must become the reader of said text, once the *other author* has crossed out and underlined the *original*'s work and devised an entirely divergent text:

And to present this new way of thinking I began to imagine new forms,

like pull-out sentences, and multiple highspeed changes in direction . . .

concertina pages of stories, pasted pictures . . . a story that was made up
of so many digressions and evasions that in order to make it readable it
would need to be divided in every direction [ ] [s]o that if you wrote it out
as continuous block it would be the same but also different. (Thirlwell 18)

The cacophonous harmonies and melodies of Thirlwell's *Kapow!* nourish the *other author* both with an idea of the generative aspect of a text, suggesting that all narratives lead one through dissimilar paths unknown, and also with the textual material required by an *other author* to outline his or her own authorial design over the *original author*'s sketched work. The minotaur in the labyrinth becomes the word on the page, an image to be inexorably rewritten.

The following novel flouts self-containment. *S.*, a book conceived by J. J. Abrams and written by Doug Dorst, follows the aforementioned principles of ramifying and labyrinthine fiction by applying them to a fictional novel, *Ship of Theseus*, written by the mysterious V. M. Straka and presented in its totality to the reader. The novel renders its ramified fictions in academic footnotes written by the fictional novel's translator, Filomela Caldeira, and footnotes of two scholars studying the novel, Jennifer Heyward and Eric Husch. The *original author*, in this novel, was responsible for the delineation of the labyrinth's textual stimuli. The *other author*, at the behest of the *original author*, must then restructure the multiple narratives exercised, and formulate his or her own ordering of the text. In other words, the reader may choose to ignore Jennifer and Eric's glosses, which introduce both information regarding the identity of Straka and a romantic liaison between the two academics, or opt to leave out Caldeira's footnotes, which oftentimes are written in peculiar code to covertly inform Straka of confidential information. In truth, the reader may even choose to disregard *Ship of Theseus*, and concentrate his or her reading on the marginalia only, designing a different *Ship of Theseus* in his or her mind to replace the ignored text. Thus, the text subsists in these alternative paths offered to the reader, which may yield different narratives in every reading. Withal, the permutational qualities of the text lie not just in the number of texts at the reader's hand, but also in the number of texts that may be conceived by the *other author* and added to *S.*. Mark the following passage, for example, regarding the character S.'s inability to narratively express his fragmented memories: "They refuse to be strung into coherent, linear narrative no matter how consciously he tries to arrange them so; in fact, the more he tries, the more the pieces resist his efforts" (Abrams and Dorst 309).

The novel features also ephemera in the form of postcards, maps written out in handkerchiefs, college newspapers, pages from a notebook, a modest selection of letters, that

contribute to the overall design of Jennifer and Eric's quest for Straka's identity but that may be consciously discarded and set aside or, in alternative, considered as the sole elements of S.'s narrative. Once more, the power of authorial decision resides in the *other author*, who complies with the appointment conceded by the novel's *original author*. The reader might, for instance, read only Eric's description of his uncle's death, and treat S.'s narrative as that sole narrative, perhaps further expanding it by selecting only the notes of Eric annotated in the book's copy that deal with his uncle's unfortunate death. In doing so, the *other author* will be devising a narrative detached from the novel *Ship of Theseus*, to create a fiction of loss, regret, recollection.

Another element in Abrams and Dorst's *S.* contributes to the generative aspect of the novel, namely the unidentified and unrecoverable Chapter 10. As the scholars inform in several of their notes to the text, the version of the chapter presented in the final text is an adulterated version edited by Caldeira, making Straka's final rendering a lost text within the text. If the reader chooses to comply with his or her appointment as *other author*, s/he may attempt to recreate Chapter 10 and dismiss Caldeira's version. It is as if the novel is asking one to tell one's own stories, just like Jennifer and Eric tell theirs through their copious marginalia. Thus, the generative aspect feeds itself off the blunderings of textual edition, subtly asking the reader to correct and rewrite them. Another example of this generative beguiling is the case of Straka's identity, which is only hinted at in the notes registered by the students and, therefore, open to the reader's own contribution. Furthermore, since the novels reportedly written by Straka are entirely fictional, the reader may feel the need to use the clues deployed by Caldeira, Jennifer, and Eric regarding these, and write, or as it were re-imagine, Straka's published oeuvre. The *other author*, in this sense, keeps adding up to the text his or her own theories regarding Straka and his published novels, assuming the identity of *original author* in regard to the latter, and contributing to the eternal expansion of the work.

To conclude our voyage to the centre of *generative fiction*, a word on the title of this subchapter, "Theory and the Labyrinth". Theory is one of the elements which link the three aforementioned novels into a coherent strand of *generative fiction*. This particular strand concerns itself with theoretical approaches to fiction, such as treatises, essays, and literary studies, that derive from a fictional source, that is, that are also fictional digressions or reinventions of the fictional texts therewith discussed (like *Ship of Theseus*). In *House of Leaves*, for example, *The Navidson Record* is presented to the reader through Zampanò's academic interpretation of the film, while at the same time, reflecting Zampanò's own life and anxieties, otherwise unwritten. It is as much a narrative of Navidson and his bizarre house as it is a narrative of the lonesome old Zampanò and his undisclosed preterite life. In *S.* and *Kapow!*, theory is the starting point to the analysis of narrative

and novelistic possibilities, the former with its scholarly investigation of the identity of Straka and fictional exegesis, and the latter with its study of the Arab Spring and the nature of revolutions that originated a fictional love story between the young Ahmad and the older Nigora, images of the new world promises and vision proposed by the revolution, and the alluring tales and memories of the old world deposed by said insurrection. The generative aspect is thus the product and the source of any extrapolation exacted on the *original author*'s text. It pervades the *structurally disintegrated text* but also the *structurally fixated text*, for it exists within and without it, either in fiction or in critical analysis of said fiction. A study of *Bleak House* will yield an alternative fiction to the one devised by Charles Dickens. Likewise, a study of *House of Leaves*, as brief as the present one, will introduce an idea of the text that is necessarily an offspring of the text itself. Theory, therefore, is as much a fictional digression as fiction itself, producing alternative, ramifying, branching, secondary narratives, or ideas of fiction, that ultimately lead to more narratives, these in turn leading to other theories, other possibilities, through anfractuous and untreadable paths, hypotheses, worlds within worlds, systems within systems, texts within texts, dissertations within dissertations, narratives within narratives that branch off into the eternal distance, forever bending to the universal song of infinity. I cannot conceive of a more unified way to finish this particular tract of my dissertation.

8. Thoughts on *Idiorealism*

What is *idiorealist fiction*? Before asking the preceding query, the reader should ask first: What is realist fiction? To attempt to elaborate a history of realism, brief though it might be, would inevitably lead to a deviation from the purpose of this dissertation and be far too extensive to include within the circumscribed limits of the work. Without any remote wish to oversimplify a pivotal literary movement in the history of literature, I shall attempt a short definition of the concept: realist fiction is that fiction which, through language, tries to seize reality and incorporate it into a rigorously structured text. Naturally, such definition does not suffice, so a summary revision of the opinion of two thinkers on the matter may contribute to clarify what my definition has suppressed. The German philosopher, Friedrich Engels, in a letter to the socialist writer Margaret Harkness, succinctly exposed his view on literary realism. "Realism," he writes, "to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (Baxandall and Morawski 114). We may infer from the usage of the term 'typical' that Engels is hinting at verisimilitude, that is, to what is expected of a certain type of character in a certain type of situation. Should one replace 'typical' with the word 'familiar', Engels's conception

would resonate with my definition of a fiction that attempts 'to seize reality'. The Welsh theorist Raymond Williams points out that from the Renaissance period the portrayal of 'reality' in literature had been associated with, and limited to, middle class values and bourgeois manners, and only with the rise of a literary 'realism' did these social values shift and mutate to incorporate the ordinariness of other social classes. Realism, Williams states, "appeared as in part a revolt against the ordinary bourgeois view of the world; the realists were making a further selection of ordinary material which the majority of bourgeois artists preferred to ignore" (Williams 581-82). Ergo, realism's inception was not wholly untouched by a certain revolutionary impetus, a desire to bring into literary language new modes of reality that had heretofore been neglected. Literary realism is not only a portrayal of a familiar reality, it is also a portrayal of more than just one single reality.

As Williams further notes, "[t]he realist novel needs . . . a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship—work or friendship or family—but many, interlocking kinds" (Williams 589). Since the second type of *structurally disintegrated novel* does not concern itself with community but with the self, it is required, so as to respect this communal sense of social history, either a definitional revision of the concept 'realism' or the introduction of a neoteric term, the conceptual progeny of the 'realist novel'. The system of 'realism', if it is to accommodate the self and reduce itself to the experience of that self, should limit itself, conceptually speaking, to the reality of that self. A redefinition of the term 'realism' would be too quixotic and imply a retroactive revision of the history of the term. The neoteric *idiorealist fiction* seems to me to be the most adequate solution to this conceptual conundrum. The prefix *idio-* derives from the Ancient Greek ἴδιοσ, meaning 'personal, private'. Attached to 'realism', it lends the word the characteristic of 'individuality', of a sphere of reality inherently attached to a single individual. Thus, *idiorealism* is a personal and disintegrated authorial vision of literary realism.

If *generative fiction* is a form of fiction which endorses and enforces the power of fiction to generate other fictions, concentrating on the generative aspect of a text to produce a multitude of different texts within a single novel, then *idiorealist fiction* is the exact conceptual opposite. Instead of focussing on the generative aspect of fiction, *idiorealist fiction* attempts only to portray a disintegrated reality using literary language. Rooted in the belief that literature should be a mimetic representation of the universe is the idea that reality, like literature, is disintegrated, lacking a common core, a coherent structure. Reality is interpreted as random, sparse, undefinable, untraceable, and, as such, incapable of being given narrative order. To accommodate literary language to that which is disintegrated and, in that disintegration, intangible, is the burden of *idiorealism*. *Structural disintegration*, therefore, is an integral part of *idiorealist fiction*, as the reader's role

in *idiorealist novels* is to formulate the structure of the novel, to integrate it into a coherent but not *fixated* order, but also to understand and interpret the novel as a unity, based on the reader's temporary constructed structure. As opposed to *generative fiction*, the reader in *idiorealist fiction* is responsible only for the erection of the building, that is, for the organization, not creation, of its elements. The creation of alternative, ramifying fictions is a secondary, if not entirely inapplicable, project. With this in mind, we may understand *idiorealism* as an expression of how, as Williams put it, "'everyday, ordinary reality' is now differently conceived", that is, the *idiorealist novel* might be regarded as one of the "new techniques that have been developed to describe this new kind of reality" (Williams 583). Hence, *idiorealism* is not, like realism, an "achievement of balance" (591), but an achievement of the disintegrated self, the self that, alienated from the community which confines his or her individuality, and in whom it no longer finds stability, seeks in the infinite individual system (the personal reality that shapes his or her surrounding world) the solace it cannot find elsewhere.

Is it possible to call the *idiorealist novel* mimetic, then? And, if so, in what sense is it mimetic? *Mimesis*, in an *idiorealist* context, entails a precise formulation, using a system of language, of the elements that compose the reality surrounding the text. In other words, a representation of the real, a formal and diegetic conception of a duplicated world: the world-as-it-is and the world-in-the-text. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *mimesis* in the following manner: "Relating to, characterized by, or of the nature of imitation; *spec.* representing, picturing, or presenting the real world (esp. in literature, art, etc.); (in *Literary Criticism*) (now freq.) realist" (*OED*, "mimetic, *n.* and *adj.*"). It is this acceptation of the word that I follow in this dissertation, one that, as we will shortly see, closely follows Aristotle's own definition.

The question of *mimesis* first arose with Socrates, who, in Plato's *The Republic*, produced a few expatiations on the nature of storytelling, imbued with a proto-narratological conscience. Socrates regarded the poet as producing both *diegesis*, that is, speaking with his own voice, therefore assuming 'himself' as the narrative voice, and *mimesis*, that is, pretending to use someone else's voice and therefore transcribing that person's speech into poetry. Thus, Socrates asks:

> [W]hen he [the poet] makes a speech in the person of someone else, shall we not say that he assimilates his manner of speech as nearly as he can to that of the character concerned? . . . Is not to assimilate oneself to another person in speech or manner to "represent" the person to whom one is assimilating oneself? (*Rep.* III, 393c)

The distinction can be summarized as one between the poetic and narrative self, who conveys his or her own narration to the reader, and the imitative self, who creates an illusory reproduction of reality, an authentic transcription of the world-as-it-is to the world-within-the-text. This ancient distinction has been contested and reconsidered throughout centuries of literary criticism (in particular by scholars of narratology) not the least by Aristotle, who in his *Poetics* makes no such distinction between *diegesis* and *mimesis*, and attributes the act of *diegesis* to a component of the *mimesis*, or representation. He writes, "Epic and tragic composition, and indeed comedy, dithyrambic composition, and most sorts of music for wind and stringed instruments are all, [considered] as a whole, representations [*mimesis*]" (*Poet.* 1.1447a). Should we extrapolate from Aristotle's words significance to the present context, the same definition should apply to the realm of literature, in general. A novel, too, is a representation. Yet Aristotle further explores the idea of representation by taking into account the idea of aesthetic integration, that is, the union of different elements that contribute to a work of art's meaning (and purpose). Consider Aristotle's idea of artistic unity:

> A plot is not unified, as some suppose, if it concerns one single person. An indefinitely large number of things happens to one person, in some of which there is no unity. So too the actions of one person are many, but do not turn into a single action . . . Therefore, just as in the other representational arts a single representation is of a single [thing], so too the plot, since it is a representation of action, ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that; and its parts (the incidents) ought to be constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed. Something which, whether it is present or not present, explains nothing [else], is no part of the whole. (*Poet.* 8.1451a)

For Aristotle, the work of art cannot represent a single person if it is conditioned by the necessity of unity required by the nature of the work itself. A tragedy, for example, needs to comply to a set of predetermined rules in order to be considered as such. The same can be said of an epic poem or of lyrical poetry. *Mimesis*, then, implies representation of action and not of character. Yet *idiorealism*, complying with Aristotle's conception of narrative integration, expels the structural armature which forces the *mimetic* aspect to pretend to coalesce with a narrative of the individual

(an artistic failure, according to the Greek philosopher), and incorporates the idea of '*structural disintegration*' to exercise *mimesis* on a single individual, to whom "[a]n indefinitely large number of things happen[ ]" and whose existence depends not in unity but in chaos.

Thus, *idiorealism* employs a conscious *mimesis* of reality and performs it on a psychological as well as external level. Further, it embodies the perfected form of *mimesis*, according to the idea proposed by Gérard Genette, of a novel that would open with a statement like Proust's ""It is absolutely necessary that I marry Albertine," and continuing thus up to the last page, according to the order of the hero's thoughts, perceptions, and actions performed or undergone" (Genette 173). This order cannot be crystallized into a fixated and linear structural configuration for to do so would be to inevitably select an arrangement for a category of psychological actions that, to be represented, does not allow for an unmediated selection. The stream-of-consciousness technique, for example, implies already an order of reasoning and thought-processes that, if unmediated, would be impossible—given their simultaneity—to translate to the page. Compare B.S. Johnson: "Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification" (Johnson, *Aren't You* 66).

As Genette writes, "[O]ne of the main paths of emancipation of the modern novel has consisted of pushing this mimesis of speech to its extreme, or rather to its limit, obliterating the last traces of the narrating instance and giving the floor to the character right away" (Genette 173). The *idiorealist novel* is concerned precisely with character, both with the self and its disintegrated, non-narratable existence. Whilst *idiorealist novels* like Chris Ware's *Building Stories* provide some sense of communal integration and are concerned with the isolation of the self within their community (the building), novels like Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, as we will shortly see, tackle the problematic 'interior monologue'—often restricted to a structural order that limits its potential as a depiction of the orderless reality—and present their own (dis)order of a narrative. The two aforementioned novels are all but the only two examples of *idiorealism* to be analysed in the following subchapters, where I shall explore them both in detail, paying particular note to their treatment of form.

9. The Disintegration of B.S. Johnson

An unfortunate circumstance thwarted B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* from being published as it was designed. Owing to demanding production costs, the Hungarian translation of the famed book-in-a-box was published as a standard bound book, its arbitrary order unintentionally given a normative configuration. The novel's twenty-seven sections, encompassing two signatures titled

"First" and "Last" and twenty-five other signatures meant to be randomly ordered, were brought out in a standard paperback edition in 1973. To work around this problem of randomized reading, each chapter of the edition was "prefaced by a different printer's symbol" (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 343). These symbols were then listed on a page at the end of the novel; it was thus designed to indicate to the reader the divisions between sections. Coe reports that Johnson, in the introduction to the translation, politely asked his Hungarian readership to remove the page where these symbols were recorded, detach each individual symbol, toss them into a hat, and then pluck a different symbol individually, determining in this way a potential order of reading (343). With this illusionist's trick, or more aptly, a writer's sleight-of-hand, a narrative would propose itself, and the reader would then indulge in just a disintegrated reading as was made available to his English and American readers.

From the beginning of his career as a writer, B.S. Johnson nourished an interest in transgressive fiction, in the invention of new forms to accommodate what he saw as a changed world (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 13). Each chapter of his first novel, *Travelling People* (1963), was written in a different literary style. His second novel, *Albert Angelo* (1964) is a "fragmentary and episodic" text, with holes cut through its pages (17).[40] *Trawl* (1966), *The Unfortunates* (1969), *House Mother Normal: A Geriatric Comedy* (1971), *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973), and the posthumous publication *See the Old Lady Decently* (1975), followed these auspicious first efforts, each devoted to the exploration of different forms of literary expression.

In the light of this authorial will to reinvigorate British fiction, consider how Johnson accused in his introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Publishing Memoirs?* (1973),[41] conventional fiction—which in this dissertation I call *structurally fixated fiction*—of being unable, in its bound, imprisoned form, employing stale styles and aged vocabulary, to grasp the aleatory and undefinable nature of the twentieth-century. He writes, "No matter how good the writers who now attempt [writing in a nineteenth-century novelistic style], it cannot be made to work for our time, and the writing of it is anachronistic, invalid, irrelevant, and perverse" (Johnson, Aren't You 66). The solution he came up with to solve this literary quandary was surprisingly simple, but not devoid of issues. The decision to publish *The Unfortunates* in a disintegrated form was symbolic of a game of metaphors, a representation of life as a series of random events. Yet with the finished novel in his

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[40] Several bookstores sent back their copies of Johnson's second novel, believing these to be damaged (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 168).

[41] An essay hailed by Jonathan Coe as "a belligerent critique of the conservatism of modern British writing, and an impassioned apologia for his own methods" (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 13).

hands, Johnson could not help but wonder if his new form had indeed come across as a sober literary representation of reality:

> Now I did not think then, and do not think now, that this solved the problem completely. The lengths of the sections were really arbitrary again; even separate sentences or separate words would be arbitrary in the same sense. But I continue to believe that my solution was nearer; and even if it was only marginally nearer, then it was still a better solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness than the imposed order of a bound book. (Johnson, *Aren't You* 74)

The instructions in the box which lodges the loose sections of *The Unfortunates* instruct the reader to begin the novel by first reading the section titled "First" and then finish by reading the section titled "Last". It is through this contradictory circumscription, considering that it was precisely the "lack of structure, that Johnson wanted to record with absolute fidelity" (Coe, *Introduction* ix), that the reader is bound to the space between these two 'goalposts' and his or her perusal of the novel's loose text inevitably limited to the boundaries set by the author.

 The Unfortunates is a book that refuses to be classified. Johnson's own distaste for the fictional nature of the novel form speaks volumes. He wanted to write a novel that was based off facts, and therefore truth, not fiction, therefore lies. In 1964, Johnson was asked by *The Observer*, where Johnson worked as a sports correspondent, to report on a game of football. When Johnson arrived at the train station in Nottingham, he realized that he had been there numerous times before. It was the city where one of his closest friends, Tony Tillinghast, had once lived as a postgraduate, before being diagnosed with cancer and eventually succumbing to the disease at the age of twenty-nine (Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 21-23). During the football match, Johnson's thoughts constantly drifted between the game he had been assigned to report and the memories of his friend that sprouted inside his head. He began to take an interest in the random order of events that had led him to that football game, taking place in that city. He began to embrace life as a network of arbitrary connections with no particular logical sequence. The Pakistani writer Zulfikar Ghose, Johnson's intimate acquaintance in London (36), and to whom the author expounded some of his views on the form of *The Unfortunates*, elaborated on the matter:

> The randomness that had led the author to write this novel had begun
> with the random decision on the part of the sports editor to assign him a
> game in Nottingham, and the game itself is a series of random moves
> where chance either makes the ball hit the crossbar or enter the net, and
> that led to his decision to insist on the shuffled pages of the text. (qtd. in
> Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 230)

The randomness of the material, then, encompassed not only the macrosystem of reality which Johnson inhabited but also the elements within that system, such as the arbitrary sequence of events in a football game or the random assignment that had led Johnson back to Nottingham. It follows that to capture in the novel form such disorder and disarrangement it would be necessary to reconsider the presentation of the text. Saporta's *Composition No.1* would provide Johnson with an adequate solution, but changes would need to be made to the form designed by Saporta. Johnson was not trying to forge a machine of narratives but a narrative machine that would convey the chaotic assortment of thoughts inside the narrator's head and the chance ordering of one's life, subjected to no particular rule, within the limited reality system.

Once familiarised with Saporta's *Composition No.1*, Johnson started to believe his novel to be superior to that of the French author, attributing this superiority to the arbitrary formal element of Saporta's novel. I believe the expression of this sanctimonious belief may clarify the distinction between *generative* and *idiorealist fiction*. Since Saporta's text depended on a stronger textual randomness, not only that of the arrangement of its loose sheets but also the relativity of "the page and what type can be fitted on it" (qtd. in Coe, *Fiery Elephant* 231)—in other words, the length of the text in each page—Johnson had the upper hand. *The Unfortunates*, composed as it is of loose sections, or signatures, could afford to possess sections of variable length, therefore not subjecting the content of the text to the rigorousness of the form. If Saporta's novel, as we have determined, sacrificed content to form because of the *other author*'s presence, Johnson's novel, on the other hand, was designed so that "content could still be allowed organically to [un]dermine form" (231).

We may thus suggest, that *idiorealist fiction*, in this particular case, implies a twofold role played by the reader, divided by the binary opposites active/passive. The reader, despite serving as an active participant in the construction of the novel, that is, in the design of the structure of the text, is nonetheless restricted by the *original author*'s intention, and therefore cannot fulfil the role of *other author* as in *generative fiction*. We owe this incapacity to perform as *other author* to the conceptual agenda blazoned by *idiorealism*, as the text seeks only to create an infinite loop in the systematic

deconstruction of a random reality, and not, like in *generative fiction*, in the generative and regenerative nature of fiction. Johnson's idea of the dialectical relationship author/reader could not be more remote than that that *generative fiction* denotes. Note, for example, the following passage: "I want my ideas to be expressed so precisely that the very minimum of room for interpretation is left. Indeed I would go further and say that to the extent that a reader can impose his own imagination on my words, then that piece of writing is a failure" (Johnson, *Aren't You* 75-76). There is an implied, underlying passivity which binds the reader to the *original author*'s initial, and subsequently disintegrated, form. It is this reason that makes *The Unfortunates* an interesting *structurally disintegrated text*. Its hybrid form lies in between two diametrically opposed worlds, that of the *structurally fixated* and the *structurally disintegrated novel*: the first and last chapters of the book are part of the former world, while the narrative in between these is part of the latter. Evidently this concedes *The Unfortunates* a generic and typological flexibility that other *structurally disintegrated novels* might not afford. And this is a consequence of the '*idiorealist* thrust' in the novel. That is, the element of *idiorealism* makes this novel (and Ware's *Building Stories*) a disintegrated narrative within a fixated textual system. Whilst in Ware's novel, as we will conclude, the fixation of the text is rooted in the text's fixed internal chronology, in Johnson's *The Unfortunates* it stems from the two mandatory chapters which subdue the reader's role as *other author* and replace it with an active-passive position that needs to be balanced in order to make sense of the text. Once deciphered, Johnson's novel demonstrates how fiction and truth can only be combined in a novel whose form is capable of integrating, but not depend on, an arbitrary disintegration. *Idiorealism*, then, is the novelistic vehicle necessary to convey this message. To return to the Hungarian farce, to bind this idea to a bound book would be to inevitably degrade its meaning, to be deprived of "the physical feel, disintegrative, frail, of this novel in its original format; the tangible metaphor for the random way the mind works, as I have said" (Johnson qtd. in Coe, *Introduction* xii).

10. Building, Disintegrating/Rebuilding, Reintegrating: Chris Ware and *Idiorealism*

Let us return to my earlier metaphor, of the novel and the building. What if there was a novel which embodied this idea? What if there was a novel that was designed as a building? Consider a graphic novel published in 2012, *Building Stories*, written and illustrated by the American artist Chris Ware, known also as the author of the series *Acme Novelty Library*. *Building Stories*, whose title is a jocose pun on the graphic novel's plot and on the notion of the novel form as 'artistic construction',

narrates the story of a building and its tenants, centring specifically on a nameless young woman and her solitary life in the old brownstone apartment building in Chicago. It is a novel about solitude and despair, everydayness and human character, an *idiorealist* reverie, which presents itself to the reader inside a box, like Johnson's *Unfortunates*, where its fourteen different 'chapters', or volumes, are placed on top of each other, disorganized and separated.[42] It is a novel meant to be read in an arbitrary fashion, as all *structurally disintegrated texts*, each of the fourteen different chapters representing in itself a self-contained microcosm. Like other *structurally disintegrated novels*, it consciously invites the reader to actively participate in the construction of the narrative's structure. To attain this, the reader is given the materials which are required for the novel's creation, each new reading of the novel being necessarily different from any previous readings. Hence, the reader has to effectively build the novel as s/he goes through the fourteen different volumes randomly distributed inside the box, required, as it were, to remove the contents of the box and randomly select a volume to read. We may summarize this act by suggesting that the reader is 'building stories'.

Each of the volumes has a particular, distinctive shape, indicative also of the diversity of content featured in the novel itself (see footnote 20). These separate elements, or volumes, of *Building Stories* are the metaphorical bricks which constitute a planned, albeit theoretically unbuilt, novel. Unbuilt but only because without the reader, there is no novel. Since *Building Stories* is an *idiorealist novel*, the reader must act as a kind of metaphysical consciousness, looking in on the minds of the novel's characters and selecting and reading their stories following no particular order so as to interpret the disorderly reality which they inhabit. In doing so, the reader is architecting not a series of different fictions or ramified narratives, but a map of the characters' lives and the strange connections that bind them.

Like Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, the novel does not openly cultivate the generative aspect. The reader may follow a different path each time s/he reads the novel, but the outcome will always

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[42] The contents of the graphic novel-in-a-box are as follows: a children's comic book about a day in the life of Branford, the Best Bee in the World; a fictional newspaper*, The Daily Bee*; a hardcover comic book that describes the everyday anxieties of the young protagonist; a visual booklet where the reader is shown, through wordless vignettes, the infancy and development of the protagonist's daughter; one fold-out which shows our nameless protagonist metaphorically trapped in a snowstorm as she ponders on her loneliness and is unable to return to her apartment building; a fold-out that shows the nameless protagonist meditating on the mysteries of her young daughter's life; an accordion-folded board that provides the reader with diagrams of the brownstone building; a comic book diary that depicts life in the apartment building on a single day; a comic book about the protagonist's neighbours and their marital preoccupations; a comic book about the protagonist's landlady and her nostalgic remembrance of the past; a comic book about our now-middle-aged protagonist's dissatisfaction with her pointless existence; a large poster and two broadsheets which further develop the narrative of the protagonist's ordinary life. The box where these volumes are stored is, in itself, a part of the novel, as several vignettes are placed around its sides.

be the same. If the reader leaves from Point A, B, C, or D, s/he shall always arrive at Point Z. Even if the circumstances of the path do change, the novel is locked within an internal chronology which cannot be disassociated from it. Unlike *Naked Lunch*, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, or *Composition No.1*, to name a few of the *generative novels* analysed in the previous subchapters, *Building Stories* has a *fixated*, even if *structurally disintegrated*, plot. Once more, this creates an impediment to the generation of other fictions, since the *other author* is excluded from the equation by the inalienable spatial and temporal setting of the novel. This exclusion is performed not only on a textual level, but also on a visual one, since the visual aspect of the novel limits the reader's generative interaction with the text.

Even if somewhat limited on the generative aspect, *idiorealist novels* manage to grasp the skeleton of a deterministic reality in form. A predetermined perspective on life implies the existence of a sequence of events which one may follow, the selection of a plethora of different paths, though aware that the outcome shall always be the same. Yet this allows for a flexible management of the structural process of the text, as the permutational nature of the novel concedes some level of inventiveness on the part of the reader. Yet, while this does not bestow on the reader the status of *other author*, at the same time it does not entirely dismiss the generative aspect. The story might always be the same, but there are countless ways of retelling it. In other words, a *fixated* narrative does not imply a *structurally fixated* form. Indeed we may understand *idiorealist fiction* as a series of variations on an invariable theme. With this in mind, we may read *Building Stories* multiple times, each reading working as another movement in the inexorable symphony of life. Whereas *The Unfortunates* eschews classification as *generative novel*, given the existence of two indissociable signposts, the "First" and "Last" chapters, *Building Stories* overcomes the limitations of *idiorealism* by only providing the requisite materials for the construction of a structure. As we will see, the process of exclusion of some of the novel's volumes may in truth contribute to the generation of fictions within the text.

For a graphic novel that blatantly defies formal conventions and openly invites the reader to participate in the construction of its structure, the narrative of *Building Stories* is surprisingly ordinary. The tone is reminiscent of Beckett's famous opening to his second novel, *Murphy*: "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (Beckett 3). In consequence of this ordinariness, Ware provokes the reader to read the novel against the grain of its formal presentation, since the uneventful narrative it presents is diametrically opposed to the transgressive structural configuration chosen (or, in a sense, not chosen) to tell it. After all, in this novel, there are no fanciful elaborations of dreamlike wonders, no knights in green armour having their heads

severed from their bodies by noblemen, or bulls of priceless worth battling in verdant fields of everlasting fertility. On the contrary, its young, nameless protagonist leads a life of no particular relevance: she struggles with clogged toilets; endures a young adult's life in solitude; toils through an uneventful marriage; bears the burden of having a child; mourns the death of her father, of her best-friend from art school, and of her cat, Miss Kitty; works through the sorrows of middle age; and ponders on the meaning of her unexceptional life. Thus, *Building Stories* reads like a turmoil of emotions, ideas, and memories, of the perfect uneventfulness of the everyday. The topographical epicentre of the narrative is nothing but a simple, old-fashioned brownstone building in Chicago, where the nameless protagonist lives for a brief period of years, sharing it with an estranged couple and an elderly woman. It is a commonplace, not a palace of marvels: a place meant for isolation and not expansion. Other narrative commonplaces, such as an unwanted abortion, a father sick with cancer, an imminent divorce, middle-age dissatisfaction, et cetera, are precisely what makes *Building Stories* a remarkable example of *idiorealist fiction*. Its ordinariness is a symbol of what it is trying to achieve: a perfect reunion of the elements which compose reality. Given access to a box of memories, recollections, records, impressions, elements of a chaotic, ineffable existence which is reconstructed arbitrarily, the reader is charged merely with the organization of these aforementioned items, and not required to adopt the strategies of the *generative other author*.

In *Building Stories*, the disintegration of form allows that which is left unrepresented and unsaid to have the same relevance as that which is given voice to and represented. The empty spaces in between the narration are to be filled with the reader's imagination.[43] For example, the reader is left to ponder on the fate of the marriage of the protagonist's neighbours or on the actual circumstances that led the protagonist to lose her leg. Ware appears to be pointing at the haunting qualities of textual narratives. His formal transgressions are mirrors that direct the reader towards the disordered nature of reality and the vague, obscure trails it leaves behind in the form of memories. Like the protagonist is haunted by her missing limb, so too is the reader haunted by the lack of knowledge left by questions unanswered. In real life, answers are the servants of questions, and in their servitude they must bend their knees to the shadows of ignorance and often refuse to surface into existence. The narrative of *Building Stories* haunts the reader with its questions but rests soundless when s/he endeavours to request any answer. It echoes, in this sense, the ambiguous and answerless reality it portrays. *Idiorealism*, then, is concerned not only with the arbitrariness of

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[43] Cf. Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, Chapter 109.

reality as it is experienced, it is interested also in the arbitrariness of reality as it is not expressed. In *idiorealist fiction*, the subliminal is just as relevant as the liminal.

The narrative of *Building Stories* is marked by frequent deviations from the story of its nameless protagonist: in one of these deviations we follow the life and opinions of a young bee, Branford, and are offered brief glimpses of the complex bee society in which Branford exists, alongside a first-hand account of poor Branford's sexual confusion—being mistaken by his fellow bees for a female bee—and the secret masturbatory passion he harbours for the Queen Bee. In yet another of these narrative deviations, we are given a succinct peek at the lives of the protagonist's neighbours, a married couple, disillusioned with marital life, reflecting on their first meeting and the once-promising beginnings of their now-withered passion. This specific narrative deviation concludes with a vision of a futuristic landscape, located one hundred years after the events previously narrated, and features a young girl using advanced technology to spy on the married woman's conversation with a man with whom she is infatuated. Are these fictional deviations 'signposts' pointing at the subliminal generative aspect in Ware's *Stories*? Are they clues to the novel's organization and structural commitment? Indeed, hints of the generative aspect pervade the subliminal level of Ware's text, evincing a hybridity characteristic of *structurally disintegrated novels*. One of the novel's most telling sequences takes place in a conversation between the protagonist and her daughter, as the former confesses that, in a dream she had had the night before, she had found a book which narrated the story of her life (Ware, *Comic Book #2* [20]). This subtle metafictional hint leads one to think that this *idiorealist novel*, dependent as it is on the unorganized reality that cannot be organized into a coherent narrative without spoiling its authenticity and tainting it with a mediated ordering of events, might also contemplate the principles of *generative fiction*. Embedded in this *idiorealist* tale an inkling of the text's generative aspect yet remains, a suggestion of ramifying fictions, a novel that might turn its eye, now and then, to the generative margin of *structural disintegration*, perhaps hoping to find, on a crepuscular day, an *other author* that will reorganize, reintegrate and, at last, rewrite it.

IV. Becoming Irrelevant: A Conclusion

The chapter about to be perused initiates with a modest waltz, played by a quartet of strings, the four principal tracts of this dissertation, that will lead the inquisitive reader to the ballroom wherein the dance of literary entropy is entertained. Novels, like wandering particles in a universe composed of an infinity of roaming galaxies, travel through the literary cosmos with a generic unease, always unsure as to whether they will be categorized as comical, pastoral, historical, naturalist, realist, surrealist, modernist, postmodernist, satirical, dystopian, utopian, fantastical, epic, science-fiction, horror, detective, gothic, sensation, neo-Victorian, poetic, literary, metafictional, et cetera, texts. The shapeshifting nature of the novel form is, in part, one of its alluring facets. The mutable apparatus, harnessed by a capable author, can elicit multifarious interpretations which, in turn, shape said apparatus into alternative, independent forms. One novel can be expanded into a myriad of distinct novels, as each interpretation adds another extra layer of variation to the monadic text. The burden of this dissertation, the phenomenon of *structural disintegration*, is naught but the apex of this mutable essence of the form. *Structurally disintegrated novels* are not subjected to generic assumptions like *structurally fixated novels*—i.e. whether they are representative of historical or gothic or sensation fiction, for example—but to formal assumptions that are centred on the core of the very text, and that encompass generic, structural, thematic, and ideological notions. Hence, a *generative novel* can, in theory, be allocated to any genre, make use of any linguistic variation, any system of language, focus on any theme, in this way hyperbolizing the metamorphic nature of the form. Likewise, an *idiorealist novel* can, in theory, be interpreted in as many ways as the number of possible permutations available, adding said number to the already interpretative value of the novel form. Compare Mikhail Bakhtin on the originality of the novel and the conception of small systems within a larger system:

> The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, [heterogeneous stylistic] unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles: the language of a novel is the system of its "languages." (Bakhtin 262)

The threads that compose the absolute tapestry of a text, that is to say the composition of said text, are in truth its quintessence, what bestow on it the metamorphic character it formally flaunts. In other words, according to Bakhtin, the element that lends the novel form its unique character is the linguistic anthological filaments it conglomerates. One may extrapolate from Bakhtin's idea the notion that the novel can lodge not only a linguistic 'super-system'[44] but also generic and ideological super-systems whence multiple forms are disclosed, stemming from ancillary systems. Compare Steven Moore, who in the introduction to his historiographical study of the novel form writes about the limitations, and lack thereof, that the novel form experiences:

> I want to rethink what we mean by a "novel," and to look at the various ways writers have kept the novel novel over the centuries. In his review of Pynchon's *Against the Day*, Luc Sante stated "the size and sprawl of Pynchon's canvas proceed from an impatience with the limits of the novel form"; but there have never been limits to the novel form . . . The sky's always been the limit for the best novelists, who couldn't care less how critics label their fictions. (Moore, *Beginnings* 34)

The non-existence of limitative formal boundaries is hence the novel's chief innovation within the system of literature. Unconstrained by the strict rules of stress, metre, rhyme, and verse that poetry carries on its shoulders, ungirdled by the girth of representational limitation inherent to the dramatic form, the novel's only limit is the lack of limit itself, the difficulty in ascertaining its boundaries precisely the absence of said boundaries. Compare Terry Eagleton's assertions regarding the novel's systematic disorder, which is tied to one's difficulty in finding a tangible, logical, unified concept in which one may accommodate a definition of the form:

> The novel is an anarchic genre, since its rule is not to have rules. An anarchist is not just someone who breaks rules, but someone who breaks rules as a rule, and this is what the novel does too. Myths are cyclical and repetitive, while the novel appears excitingly unpredictable. In fact, the novel has a finite repertoire of forms and motifs. But it is an extraordinarily capacious one even so. (Eagleton 2)

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[44] To wit, a super-system composed of smaller linguistic systems.

Ergo, the novel form is the lack of a defined form, it is the lack of a universal stylistic concatenation, it is formal multiplicity applied to a transgression of exclusive interpretation. Further, even considering what Eagleton calls the novel's "finite repertoire", it is crucial to keep in mind how the form always finds a way to better itself, to renovate tradition, to rethink language, to re-propose canonical laws within that limited model. One need just look at *structural disintegration* and how its inception once more reinvigorated a form which was approaching the ebullition of realistic and naturalistic conventions, the exhaustion of old forms and ineffective literary experiments. Finally, compare Michael Schmidt, in the prologue to *The Novel: A Biography*, concerning the conclusion at which he arrived after writing an exhaustive review of the history of the novel and its reception:

> If a theory were to emerge, it would be that the achieved novel belongs to an unsubornable family, that whatever use a novel is put to in its own age, it survives not because of its themes or its intentions but because of something else, to do with form, language, invention, and an enduring resistance to cliché, an irreducible *quality*. A *something*. (Schmidt 3)

It would seem, based on what we have seen of the theoretical assumptions on the novel, and taking into account my own analysis of the *structural disintegration* of the form—that is, the schismatic transformation into texts which can be read in any order and texts which are *structurally fixated* by an author—it would seem that these recent fissive developments of the form are part of an entropic process induced by the self-sufficient, regenerative essence of the novel form, which throughout its long history[45] has subsisted and resisted literary inertia and formal lethargy. Can we conclude that the novel form is innately dependent on its mutability to resist creative stagnation or even conceptual fixation?

Regarding the conclusions at which one has arrived after this extensive study of the novel form, one must begin by first stating, paradoxically, the limitations of this analysis. Owing to the restricted extension of the present work, a comprehensive study of *structural disintegration* was limited to a review of the fundamental principles behind the concept and the notable works which employed it. Second, the essayist's own linguistic limitations made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of *structurally disintegrated novels* currently in existence, though surely the scope of works

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[45] Vide Steven Moore's *The Novel: An Alternative History* (2 Vols.)).

analysed in this dissertation, limited as it is to English, Spanish, French, Serbian literatures, is not suggestive of a cultural and national exclusivity. Third, and perhaps the most limitative aspect of any formalist analysis, the mutable character of literature, in particular of the novel form, that allows for an easy contestation of the enumerated principles of *structural disintegration* on the basis of its neoteric nature. To put it another way, as one may attest and prove the existence of a *disintegration* in the literary panorama of the preceding and current century, one may easily prove the contrary and suggest that this *disintegration* is no more than the embodiment of that which was already at any reader's hand, that is, a disintegrated, creative reading of any text as *other author*.[46] These limitations set aside, let us proceed with a summary revision of the present dissertation.

First, we were introduced, in the first chapter, to a novelistic division between *structurally fixated* and *structurally disintegrated texts*: the former referring to texts which have an *original author*, a fixed structure, and an authorial 'structural purpose'; the latter referring to texts which have no predefined structure and depend on the reader's active participation, that creates meaning in it. In the first term, *structural fixation*, we further identified another division, that of *conventional novels* and *defiant conventional novels*. The former concept implies the following three principles: linear structural design; presence of storytelling; conservative experimentalism. The latter concept, on the other hand, entails the following three principles: defiance of tradition and convention; lack of focus on, or absence of, storytelling; subordination to experimentalism. We further verified that texts which were once thought to indulge in an eschewal of convention, were later incorporated in the system of *conventional novels*. The movement of time, the normativeness of experimental techniques, and critical reappraisals, convert said texts into conventionality.

The second chapter was dedicated to a thorough exploration of *structural disintegration*, taking into consideration the inception of a typological model which determines the existence, in said *structural disintegration*, of *generative fiction* and *idiorealist fiction*. The first concept refers to *structurally disintegrated novels* which require an *original author*, who first designs the text, and an *other author*, the reader, who will organize and give structure to the text so that new fictions are created from the elements devised by the *original author*. *Generative fiction* is dependent on the development of the generative aspect of *structurally disintegrated novels*, that is, the elements which allow the reader to become the *other author* and create infinite narratives from a single text. The second concept, *idiorealism*, denotes novels which are *structurally disintegrated* in order to mimetically reproduce an orderless reality that cannot be contained in a bound, *structurally fixated* form. An *idiorealist text* is not

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[46] I am highlighting here, in particular, *generative fiction*.

interested in the generative aspect, but rather in the multiple readings that are made available within a single narrative system. In the second chapter of the present dissertation we began by analysing the first type, *generative fiction*, by studying four novels which heralded this type of *structurally disintegrated fiction* without actually being *structurally disintegrated novels*. These novels were Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*, and Perec's *Life A User's Manual*. This was followed by an analysis of the principal *generative, structurally disintegrated novels*, from Saporta's *Composition No.1*, a work of infinite permutations, Edouard Levé's *Works*, which multiplied Saporta's permutations by relying on the reader's activity and creativity, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, a novel of syllabic disintegrated readings, Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, a collection of micro-narratives that invites the reader to follow the artistic process of creation, Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, a text that, with a metafictional touch, theorizes on *structural disintegration*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, a text that was designed by an *other author*, hence doubling the reader's role as *other author*, Milorad Pavić's three novels against immortality, works which were designed to be infinite so as to prevent them from disappearing like their *original author*, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, Adam Thirlwell's *Kapow!*, and J.J. Abrams and Doug Dorst's *S.*, a triptych of novels that regard theory as a means to produce fictional expansion. This was subsequently followed by an analysis of *idiorealism*, its foundation and conceptual logic, and two *idiorealist novels*, B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, a novel with a *structurally disintegrated* nucleus and a *fixated* narrative, and Chris Ware's *Building Stories*, a graphic novel with a *structurally disintegrated* nucleus and a *fixated* sequence of events.

While with our study of *generative fiction* we observed how the shift of power from author to reader, and how the dismissal of 'structural purpose', contributed toward a reconsideration of the nature of fiction, and of the reader's power over the text, with our study of *idiorealist fiction*, we verified that the two *idiorealist* novelists, Johnson and Ware, found in *structural disintegration* a new, innovative form to do battle with the limitations of realism and the demands of a postmodernity that struggles to find an adequate voice to translate itself to the page.

And what of the aforementioned literary entropy? Can one concede that the novel form may share the principles of the second law of thermodynamics?[47] I shall attempt to explain. The novel, fuelled and sustained from the very moment of its conception by a liberating approach to

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[47] Vide Max Planck's *Treatise on Thermodynamics*: "The second law of thermodynamics states that there exists in nature for each system of bodies a quantity, which by all changes of the system either remains constant (in reversible processes) or increases in value (in irreversible processes). This quantity is called, following Clausius, the entropy of the system" (Planck 88).

textual narrative and an undefinable propulsive defiance against convention and limitation, was from the eighteenth-century, with the novels of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, et al.,[48] attached to a predetermined number of rules and principles that curbed said liberating and defiant pulse. The persistence of novelistic formal and diegetic experimentation, however, induced a disintegration of its structural design, one that I have named *structural disintegration*. This obliteration of the *original author*'s structural purpose, this redefinition of the dialectical relationship author/reader (the latter increasingly becoming the dominant force in the construction of the text), this reconsideration of what the novel signifies and represents, are all the aftereffects of the advent of *structural disintegration*. We may further suggest that the structural order of the incipience of the *conventional novel*—a concept which, as we have seen, witnessed conceptual changes over time to accommodate texts that were once regarded as unconventional—from said structural order the novel faced an entropic textual and formal condition, that beheld the genesis of transgressive novels such as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, that culminated with an absolute *structural disintegration* of the novel form and a relocation of the *original author* to a status of subordination to an all-inclusive *other author*. This absolute disintegration both hampers the possibility of the novel form stagnating in repetitious inventiveness or being replaced by another literary form, just as the novel replaced the poem. As we verified from Bakhtin's, Moore's, Eagleton's, and Schmidt's theoretical evaluations of the form, the novel is a literary form that subsists on the continuous metamorphosis of its concept, the continuous resistance to formal boundaries, the continuous support for linguistic liberation, and the continuous continuity of its history as such.

After all of these considerations, one perhaps might conclude that these categorizations can be, in a sense, self-defeating. While, admittedly, they demonstrate the power of literature to create and rewrite itself, to generate narratives that stem from a single narrative, by doing so, they also suggest that all narratives, *fixated* or *disintegrated*, and all structures, *fixated* or *disintegrated*, can be rewritten, retold, and misread. The purpose of *structural disintegration*, then, is to produce a reaction which I shall call 'defixation,' that is, the deconstruction of the reader's relationship to the literary work that allows *structurally fixated texts* to read as *structurally disintegrated*. Consider Paul de Man's concept of 'misreading', the belief that all interpretations of literature are misreadings and, as such, misinterpretations. According to de Man, the act of reading is, in itself, a re-elaboration of what is written in the literary text, a personal, intimate exegesis (McQuillan 35). As de Man writes, "Literature as well as criticism—the difference between them being delusive—is condemned (or

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[48] Vide Terry Eagleton's *The English Novel: An Introduction*, Chapters 2&3 (viz. "Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift" and "Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson").

privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself" (de Man 19). Hence, exegetic exercises find in the stability of misreading the necessary space to re-elaborate textual meaning.

In the light of this stability of instability, *structural disintegration* is inherently paradoxical. If, on the one hand, it sets itself apart from *structural fixation* by disintegrating and deconstructing the form of fiction and the dialectical relationship author/reader, in doing so, it underlines its own unnecessariness. It 'defixates' the *structurally fixated text* and renders it the object of an *other author*'s manipulatory quill. If all fictions are *structurally disintegrated*, then there is no such thing as *structural disintegration*.

Furthermore, the *structurally disintegrated novel* incongruously transfigures itself into a *structurally fixated text*, a process which happens precisely because the *original author* circumscribes the reader to the necessity of rebuilding the *structurally disintegrated text*. The reader is bound, then, to follow the *original author*'s form, which is already structurally fixated in its deconstructed, *structurally disintegrated* structure. That is to say, the disintegrated condition of the text is already a fixation of the text to a structural configuration, even if that configuration is, in itself, the absence of structure. Note the thoughts of one critic on the *generative*, *structurally disintegrated novel*, *Hopscotch*:

> [E]ven though novels such as *Hopscotch* are usually viewed as exemplary open works designed to engage the reader in the endless play of signification, in this case it appears that Cortázar is merely erecting a facade, a textual ploy utilized to lull the reader into a false sense of equal participation. If readers traditionally read a text any way they want to, Cortázar has beat them at their own game by making them produce the text the way *he* wants them to even though they remain unaware of this. (Simpkins 65)

Structural disintegration validates the plurality of fiction, the unnecessariness of literature, the inexorability of 'misreading', the paradox of the *structurally fixated* and yet *disintegrated* structure. At first, it liberates the reader from the constraints of *structural fixation*, effacing the author and

exposing the mechanics of the text.[49][50] This is followed by a destabilization of his or her reading method. This, in turn, is followed by the procreation of either multiple narratives or multiple readings of the same narrative, *generative* and *idiorealist fiction*, respectively. This procreation of multiplicity perpetuates the *structurally disintegrated novel* and lends it infinite value. Afterwards, it is fixated in that perpetuity because the *disintegration* is incapable of finding a fixed, stable form, and that lends it stability and fixation. Thus, the five principles of the hyperentropic *structurally disintegrated novel* are liberation, destabilization, procreation, perpetuation, and fixation in said perpetuity. For that reason, because of the circular reasoning of 'fixation' and 'defixation', *structural disintegration* is the textual statement of irrelevance. In the light of this haunting revelation, it is necessary to revise the metaphor of the building first introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. Assuming that fiction is superfluous and irrelevant on its own, based on the conclusions we have gathered on the preceding paragraphs, a novel is not a building, but the conception of a building. With this in mind, a novel is a structure which is only 'structure' when the reader, active or passive, disguised as *other author*, or as the essential, intrinsic quality of itself, as the receiver of the novel, decides to interpret fiction, misread it, and thus, validate the infinity of other 'buildings', that is, novels, which spawn from this disintegrating decision. Perhaps it is better to re-evaluate our concept of novel entirely: a novel is the promise of a building.

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[49] Cf. Derrida's "Two Words for Joyce": "[T]here are perhaps only two manners, or rather two greatnesses, in this madness of writing by which whoever writes effaces himself, leaving, only to abandon it, the archive of his own effacement. These last two words speak madness itself" (Derrida, "Two words"146). Note how the French theorist expounds on the idea of a book that is impervious to an author, a book that is meant for a reader, product of no intellect, in a sense 'authorless', the effacement having been completed.

[50] Note also how Derrida's comments are conceptually tied to *structural disintegration*, that implies this absolute effacement of the author while at the same time stating it through the imperiousness of the disintegrated form (forcing the reader to become an active participant of the narrative is, in a sense, contrasting with any sort of authorial effacement): "I'm not sure of liking Joyce, of liking him all the time. And it's to explain this possibility that I talked of two greatnesses to measure that of writing by which whoever writes pretends to efface himself, leaving us caught in his archive as in a spider's web. Let us simplify outrageously. There is first of all the greatness of s/he who writes in order to give, in giving, and therefore in order to give to forget the gift and the given, what is given and the act of giving, which is the only way of giving, the only possible - and impossible - way. Even before any restitution, symbolic or real, before any gratitude, the simple memory, in truth merely the awareness of the gift, on the part of giver or receiver, annuls the very essence of the gift. The gift must be without return, without a sketch, even a symbolic one, of gratitude. Beyond any 'consciousness', of course, but also beyond any symbolic structure of the unconscious. Once the gift is received, the work having worked to the extent of changing you through and through, the scene is other and you have forgotten the gift and the giver. Then the work is loveable, and if the 'author' is not forgotten, we have for him a paradoxical gratitude, which is however the only gratitude worth its name if it is possible, a simple gratitude without ambivalence . . . One can at least dream of this possibility, and it is the idea of a writing which gives" (Derrida, "Two words"146-47).

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