

No Place Like Home: Gabi Martínez's  
*Ático* (*Top-Floor Apartment*) and Javier  
Calvo's "*Una Belleza Rusa*"  
(*A Russian Beauty*)

ROOTED SELVES AND NETWORKED SELVES

Like the trees that Deleuze and Guattari (2013) disparage, the home can function as an emblematic image of the rooted self of identity. For Gaston Bachelard (1964), the home is both a physical manifestation and a container of intimacy, the most profound embodiment of individual history and consciousness: "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home ... the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (5–6). Bachelard draws inspiration from an idealized vision of the French suburban middle-class house (Ockman 1998, 79). Architectural features like the attic, the cellar, and drawers configure the compartments of one's deepest being. Bachelard's spatial phenomenology places the self at the center of a series of concentric circles: bedroom, home, community, region, nation, world, cosmos.

So what occurs in a networked society where this neat spatial order is transformed into criss-crossing lines of movement and communications? William J. Mitchell (2003) describes this new social geography, where the self is no longer localized within a solidly centralized domestic sphere:

The archetypal structure of the network, with its accumulation and habitation sites, links, dynamic flow patterns, interdependencies, and control points, is now repeated at every scale from that of neural networks to digital circuitry to that of global transportation networks [...] the constants in my

world are no longer provided by a contiguous home turf: increasingly, my sense of continuity and belonging derives from being electronically networked to the widely scattered people and places I care about. (9, 17)

If walls and other layers of protection have traditionally served as the hegemonic controllers of power and information, Mitchell argues that increasingly access points, links, switches, and flow patterns regulate what comes in and what stays outside. As opposed to concentric layers of enclosure, the contemporary world is configured by bundles of interconnected networks ranging from the synapses that produce thoughts to the global routes that direct commerce and people.

However, there is a tension underlying Mitchell's compelling account of networked subjectivity. His off-the-cuff definition of this new subjectivity, "I link, therefore I am" (62), suggests the need to find a core I within the entangled chains of bits and atoms that envelop and penetrate the "cyborg self." If Bachelard's consciousness moves about the memory-laden enclosures of the childhood home, Mitchell's moves about the personalized network of "scattered people and places I care about," which gives him a "sense of continuity and belonging." It is different from Bachelard's notion of belonging in that the subject is constructed from relations developed in an ongoing network structure, not from a fixed internal structure formed in childhood. But, as the title of his book *Me++* indicates, these relations serve as augmentations to the core self that is still at the center of its particular universe. Mitchell's nomadic lifestyle, as a high profile academic, is held together by an emerging liquid architecture: "my online world, which once consisted of ephemeral and disconnected fragments, has become increasingly persistent, interconnected and unified; it's there again, pretty much as I left it, whenever I log in from a new location" (17). His networked subject still seeks a place like home, now in a stable set of virtualized interconnections.

The fictions in this chapter draw out this tension through the recurring image of the home as the seat of identity, one that is continually challenged by the liquid social geographies the characters inhabit. Unlike Mitchell, they do not find a stable place like home in any of their physical or virtual worlds. As discussed in the introduction, modernity produced a subject whose sense of belonging to the world is tethered to individual, regional, and national identities, based on stable differences and oppositions. These identities are ridden with conflict, both internal and external, but the fiction of a rooted singular self is maintained at all costs. In the stories studied

here these walls are torn apart and characters must face the radical relationality that underlies existence.

The link between homes and individualism has become especially poignant in Spain over the last decades, with the housing bubble that fuelled the country's expanding economy throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, then burst during the 2008 global financial crisis. Luis Moreno Caballud (2012) argues that the endless construction, speculation, and greed set into motion by the bubble became defining characteristics of Spanish cultural life. He refers to an article by novelist Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio that uses the metaphor of empty boxes to describe individualistic ethics of competition and success, whereby subjects are driven by the blind desire to produce and achieve. Sánchez Ferlosio contrasts these empty *cajas* (boxes) made to contain anything—the filler material of individual benchmarks—with *estuches* (cases) shaped specifically around particular objects. For Moreno Caballud, the delirious construction of empty homes, and the practices of production and consumption it entailed, fomented a cultural logic of empty boxes in Spain: “No es de extrañar, entonces, que en poco tiempo la cabeza de los españoles se llenara precisamente de eso: de vacío” (541; No wonder, then, that the heads of Spaniards soon filled up with precisely that: emptiness). In this light, as Moreno Cabellud points out, Spain's 15-M *Indignados* movement becomes especially poignant. *Indignados*, meaning the indignant or the outraged, is the term popularly used for those who occupied Spain's central squares and built improvised tent cities in 2011, beginning in Madrid's Puerta del Sol on May 15th. They were inspired by similar uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Iceland, and elsewhere, and they were a forerunner of the North American Occupy movements. They called for broad-reaching changes in political culture in order to attack corruption, undemocratic practices, and the government's subservience to financial interests and the economic directives of the European Union. Moreover, they rejected the logic of empty boxes *filled* with individual and family lives for an experiment in evolving living arrangements that *encase* communal relations. As Amador Fernández Savater (2012) writes about the process:

a los pocos días no estábamos allí para gritar nuestra indignación contra nadie, sino por la belleza y la potencia de estar juntos, ensayando modos de participación común en las cosas comunes. (676–677; after a few days we

weren't there to shout our indignation against anybody, but rather to experience the beauty and power of being together, rehearsing modes of collective participation).

He defines the occupied squares as “espacios de invitación” (spaces of invitation), facilitating the inclusive construction of shared practices, as opposed to domestic walls that exclude and build separate lives.

Both Mitchell and these critics challenge the cultural modes epitomized by Bachelard's spatial phenomenology, which in any case have already been severely destabilized by the global financial system and related virtualized social geographies. The 2008 crisis made it clear, once again, that prioritizing individual property and wealth accumulation leads to a destructive cultural logic. Nonetheless, these are ingrained cultural modes that structure economies, collective practices, and individual psychologies. Mitchell embraces networked modes of being but seeks a way to accommodate the individualist drive for an anchoring home space within them. Likewise, when the *indignados*—and occupy movements in other countries—attempted to develop alternative forms of social organization, they had to struggle with their own habits and attitudes. As Fernández-Savater explains:

Invitar no es una operación sencilla: hay que confiar en el desconocido, saber acoger, tener algo que ofrecer, evitar los cierres identitarios, estar dispuesto a dejarse alterar por lo que el otro tiene que traer, permitir al otro reapropiarse del espacio y reconfigurarlo a su gusto. (677–678; Inviting is not so simple: you have to trust strangers, learn to take them in, have something to offer them, avoid identity enclosures, be willing to let oneself be altered by what the other brings, allow the other to reappropriate the space and reconfigure it freely).

The narratives studied in this chapter explore these problematics, employing homes as metaphors for autonomous identities. The idea of total affective immersion when the walls of individualist selfhood crumble is disturbing or downright terrifying, associated with destruction and with the abject. There are two reasons for this fear. First of all the characters are tied to a desire for the trappings of individualism: success and fame, reified personal and national identities, mastery of the object world. This drive to mark oneself out as unique leads to what Kaja Silverman (2009), paraphrasing Lou Andreas Salomé, describes as the turning away from the other, which ultimately leads to an alienation from one's own being. Only by seeking the sameness of all existence can we regain ourselves: “To

rediscover oneself in another is to recognize him or her as another embodiment of the same flesh" (43). But humanism's "demand to be an 'individual'" turns those others "into rivals and enemies" and "gives us a dystopic view of our own multiplicity" (4). As Julia Kristeva (1982) shows, this dystopic view is also reflected in the fear and disgust inspired by the abject: corpses, bodily secretions, orifices. Such things repel us because they break the carefully guarded border between the self and the outside, threatening a dissolution of autonomous subjectivity.

Secondly, capitalism's mechanisms of social control increasingly pinpoint the disembodied affect that connects us to the world at large. Deleuze (1992) describes a transition from Michel Foucault's disciplinary order—where the individual is normalized and classified through institutions like the home, the school or the prison—to "societies of control" ("Postscript"). As Patricia Clough (2007) puts it:

The target of control is not the production of subjects whose behaviors express internalized social norms; rather, control aims at the never-ending modulation of moods, capacities, affects, and potentialities, assembled in genetic codes, identification numbers, ratings profiles and preference listings, that is to say, in bodies of data and information (including the human body as information and data). (19)

Corporate and governmental agencies configure subjects as quantifiable bundles of movements, abilities, and tastes that can be analyzed algorithmically. This is especially evident in the recent revelations that the US National Security Agency and telecom corporations work together to compile metadata on the flows of movement and communications of anonymous citizens (Risen and Poitras 2015). In this context the integrity of the individual self can be seen as a defensive wall against a capitalist system of social control that breaks us down to a mass of manipulable desires and fears. Thus the fear of self-dissolution Kristeva identifies with the abject is colored by the parallel fear of the self being dissected and commandeered by multifarious systems of control.<sup>1</sup>

However, individualism is not an effective form of resistance because it is still embedded within mechanisms of control. Such mechanisms may not conceive subjects as separate individuals—preferring to "modulate" moods rather than "mold" identities in Deleuze's words (4)—but do use individualism to their ends, as in the example he gives of corporations stimulating rivalry: "an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals

against one another and runs through each, dividing each within" (5). Competition is an affect dispersed throughout the corporate environment, preying on individual pride but shaping not so much individuals as their relations. Deleuze explains that control mechanisms have grown within the structures of discipline: the family, schools, hospitals, and other prime institutions of discipline are in perpetual crisis but they are still pillars of social order, gradually being modified to the new paradigm. Thus the quantifying forces of affective control are layered within the classificatory forces of discipline. Humanism's insistence on individualism, rooted in the home-psyche Bachelard describes, is still there. But this Me++ individual inhabits a multiplicity of selves, emotionally engages global electronic networks, and is subject to continuous modulation and change.

The texts studied in this chapter feature characters torn between rooted identity and affective belonging. The home stands metaphorically as both anchor and prison for the rooted subject, reflecting how difficult it is to find release from constricting identities and immerse oneself in the undivided world of affective belonging, even in a social context where formerly solid identity discourses are continually dissolving. Not only do these stories frame characters and places within continuously shifting contexts, but the stories themselves are also configured as contingent conjunctions of semi-autonomous parts, as assemblages.<sup>2</sup> These narrative structures contribute to the breaking down of the house of identity. The world outside this house is thrilling but terrifying: it offers the promise of immersive becoming but is permeated by abjection and by corporate manipulation.

### ÁTICO—THE VIRTUAL QUAGMIRE

Gabi Martínez's writing centers on the singularity of places and subjective experience. His several travel books, both fictional and non-fictional, highlight the intrinsic value of the voyage as the discovery of the other and the rediscovery of the self within the other, breaking through the economic injustice and alienation that characterize contemporary society. *Ático* (*Top-floor apartment*, 2004) reflects these general themes but remains stationary in the protagonist Eduard's top-floor Barcelona apartment, where he is holed up in the fall of 2001, determined to design the ultimate virtual reality videogame. Cross-cultural contact occurs physically through his relations with the Moroccans who live in the apartment across the street and virtually through the news from New York and Afghanistan that flashes repeatedly across his television and computer screens.

The chronological narrative of Eduard's time in the apartment alternates with the parallel story of the Japanese player Kazuo in the game he creates, where Eduard's experience is reflected in new guises. Further layers are added by emails between Eduard and his attractive neighbor Faridza, as well as brief chapters with tangential information on topics like video-games, Morocco, or Afghanistan. The novel thus allows a multidimensional universe to unfold, with elements deflected through various planes of virtual and physical reality. Christine Henseler (2011) argues that this "looping technique" (166) not only breaks up the singular universe of linear narrative but also disrupts the continuity of characters' identities:

The novel contains sixty-three chapters and four different third-person perspectives that interlace fragments of identities and sentences in each. Words, images and characters appear and disappear, refracted in various scenes and media, providing a peek-a-boo effect of surprising results, all topped off with supposedly realistic sound bites and 3D visuals. (163)

The novel is structured like an assemblage of perspectives, words, images, and identities: moveable parts that reassemble continuously into different malleable forms. The result, as Henseler implies, is a novel and characters that do not proceed from a core internal logic but unfold spontaneously through external interaction, creating unexpected results.

In this way, *Ático* reflects widespread hopes that new media technologies might help forge a more participatory culture, their virtual refractions invoking the potential of the virtual that Deleuze and Guattari reclaim. Although in modern times the word virtual is associated with illusion and falsehood, its Latin root *virtus* refers to the possibility of objects or situations to transform into something else. The virtual is not opposed to the real but rather alludes to forces that exist in the present—traces of the past, future potentialities—and become actual by combining with other forces. This vindication of the virtual forms part of their attack on the notion of the enclosed individual as the ultimate container and processor of meaning, in favor of a multiple and ever mutating consciousness, inhabiting an open field without beginning or end. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 and 2013; Hardt 1993, 16–19; Massumi 1992, 37–38). Applying these ideas to emerging media technologies, Pierre Lévy (1999) argues that the interlinking of distant spaces through electronic networks entails two complementary processes: virtualization when our voices or likenesses are transported to a different place or our vision is filtered through the frame of

a video camera; and actualization when situations or objects from remote locations enter into our physical space. While acknowledging that virtualization is a timeless human activity, evidenced for example in the abstractions of language and art, Lévy claims that in our times it has become quicker, further reaching, and more consciously performed (19–33). Lévy (1997) foresees the emergence of a “collective intelligence” which articulates different subjective experiences and ways of knowing.

In *Ático*, the positive value attributed to travel in Martínez’s other writings is applied to the virtual transmission of images, ideas, and affect. Eduard’s apartment is a cocoon that receives stimuli from the exterior, which he reshapes to formulate a groundbreaking game that becomes a worldwide phenomenon. Global mediascapes define Eduard’s immediate surroundings, and his emotional experience of this hybrid space is virtualized, joining back into those same networks, and then actualized in conjunction with different bodies and places around the world. One player remarks:

Se percibe un alto grado de nostalgia, de deseos incumplidos, de anhelo de lo imposible. Y para mí ése es otro de sus aciertos. Consigue un clima general pese a que cada pantalla es distinta. (87; The player perceives a high degree of nostalgia, of unfulfilled desires, of longing for the impossible. And for me that is one of its strengths. It conveys a general overall atmosphere even though each screen is different).

Eduard’s emotional state pervades the virtual world he has created. It becomes a floating space that others may occupy and reconfigure, their histories and sentiments merging with those of the game’s designer.

Through Kazuo’s immersion in Eduard’s game world, the programmer’s dreams are combined with his body and thoughts, reflecting the virtual collective intelligence envisioned by commentators like Lévy. Kazuo becomes so engrossed in the virtual spaces that he forgets they are simulations. He sweats from non-existent heat, feels the pain when an old man attacks him with a *porrón* (glass wine jar with a long spout), and finds himself on the verge of tears when talking to a fictional version of Faridza. He has merged with Eduard’s fantasy world, physically feeling the sting of its violence and emotionally feeling the programmer’s profound frustration. Moreover, the object of the game is to come to some sort of understanding with the lonely characters that inhabit different top floor apartments, so that they will allow the player to pass onto the next screen.



If the game is a “desafío virtual al ser humano” (25; virtual challenge to humankind) as the narrator describes it, the challenge is mainly to comprehend the other. In addition to interpreting and responding to the fictional characters in the game, Kazuo often employs his knowledge of the now-famous Eduard to anticipate situations or read into allusions. When meeting Faridza he is even called upon to play the role of Eduard.

Kazuo's convergence with Eduard's emotional world reflects Henry Jenkins's (2008) idea of an emerging “convergence culture,” where narrative content passes seamlessly through various platforms: computers, televisions, mobile devices, and face-to-face conversations. Just as Kazuo's immersion in the game occurs through his bodily and emotional responses, Jenkins argues that media-facilitated convergence does not take place within specific media appliances but within human brains and social interactions. This technologically mediated interconnection of emotional worlds and nerve centers raises hopes that new media might help forge a participatory democratic culture: “Right now, we are mostly using this collective power in our recreational life, but soon we will be deploying those skills for more ‘serious’ purposes” (4).

However, these utopian hopes invoked in the novel are often overshadowed by its equally dystopian inflections: Eduard's individualist intransigence which distances him from Faridza, the prejudice that courses through the story's virtual and physical spaces, the appropriation of Eduard's frustrated desires and emotional experiences by the game's capitalist profit motive. Faridza wishes to meet Eduard in person but despite his deep attraction to her he refuses to leave his apartment or accept visitors until he has finished programming the game. His delay allows the political and social aftershocks of 9/11 to come between them, as Faridza's family calls her back to Morocco before they can meet face-to-face. Echoes of their truncated romance abound in the game's situations and dialogues, like unpleasant memories surfacing in dreams. Eduard is absorbed by the single-minded, individualistic goal of creating the ultimate videogame and achieving fame. His enclosure in his home and immersion in global networks becomes the ultimate sign of this self-imposed isolation and turning away from the other.

The novel emphasizes moments when the gap between Eduard and Faridza's terraces is physically bridged, beginning with the mint aroma that enters into his apartment when she comes home from the university and waters the plants. This daily ritual alerts him to her arrival and inevitably brings him outside to speak to her to for a few moments, before her wary

grandfather Ahmed calls her into the house. In order to escape Ahmed's vigilance Eduard writes his email address on a piece of paper and throws it to her. As it crosses Eduard compares it to a shining white *luna imprevista* (68; unforeseen moon). Faridza then calls it *altair*, which she explains is Arabic for *la que vuela* (69; the flying one). The half-moon is, of course, a symbol of Islam, and Altair is the name of a groundbreaking personal computer released in 1975. Their words link the paper's flight to a beautiful and "unforeseen" vision of a foreign culture and to the promise of computers to fly messages between people in different places and walks of life. Cultural and interpersonal convergence is again highlighted when Eduard and Faridza dance together at a distance to Algerian Rai music, which itself is a hybrid of Western, Arabic, and African forms (Henseler 165). The crossings of smells, music, language, and symbols signify the affective connections that can be made in the multicultural globalized city, a theme that will be discussed in detail with relation to the cross-cultural narratives analyzed in Chap. 5. But Eduard extracts himself from the rich interaction of the street and encloses himself in a bubble, disallowing the development of spontaneous interests and desires.

The gap between Eduard and Faridza's apartments is then filled with the echoes of post-9/11 hostilities, representing a twenty-first century version of the historical divide between Europe and Northern Africa. Old cultural prejudices are sustained by a new social geography of mini-divides between separate homes in multicultural cities like Barcelona, where each household is more connected to global networks than to the public spaces that traditionally bring neighborhoods together. The story begins nine days after 9/11 and the narrator describes how a tightly integrated Western world participates in a mass of instantaneous rumors and reports, creating an ominous environment where further violence is imminent. Localized events like the attack on the Twin Towers not only manifest global conflicts but are also elevated to a virtually interconnected space where their echoes and reflections multiply with quick-fire consequences in all regions. Hostile shouts are heard from of an unseen neighbor during the Muslim family's prayers and these tensions come to a head when Ahmed's pet hawk is shot down from the sky. The violence and rage floating around global networks suddenly materialize in this bullet and then disappear just as quickly behind the closed windows Eduard scans for the culprit. This flash incident leads to Faridza's return to Morocco.

More often than not, then, the sentiments looped through *Ático's* various levels are intolerance, mistrust, and loneliness. The fluidity between

the different narrative planes sets into motion two mutating but persistently divisive dichotomies: East-West and man-woman. While 9/11 is the spark, these tensions are inscribed into the long history of conflicts, prejudice, and mutual influence between the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Africa, revived by the recent wave of immigration to Spain. Daniela Flesler (2008) connects this renewed prejudice to Spain's efforts to establish a clear European identity, forged in part from the suppression of historical and cultural links to its African neighbors. While Eduard is not consciously xenophobic, he is often unable to see Faridza and Ahmed as anything but a representation of otherness. Concerned about Eduard's self-imposed isolation, Faridza emails him biographies of writers who also sought solitude, which he pores over for subtle personal messages to no avail. Reading all sorts of malicious intentions into her texts he concludes:

Era mora a fin de cuentas, y si ya es difícil desentrañar lo que piensa una mujer, la complicación religiosa convertía a aquella preciosidad en un misterio singularmente inescrutable. (98; She was Muslim after all, and as if it were not already hard enough to figure out what a woman is thinking, the added religious factor made this beautiful girl into a wholly undecipherable mystery.)

Rather than recognizing that their possibilities for sincere interchange are limited by the physical distance he imposes, Eduard falls back on old prejudices and exoticisms. His turning away from the other accentuates both historical and contemporary social-geographical divisions.

Thus the gap between their terraces reproduces the Strait of Gibraltar on a micro scale. Reflecting the new social geography described by Mitchell, the single imposing border is amplified and disseminated as a thousand invisible borders between differently wired lives. The city's geography is made up of multiple levels and dimensions epitomized by Eduard's rooftop home. The threat here is not that outsiders may encroach upon Spain's hard won modernity. Instead, *Ático* reveals an anxiety that urban communities will be fragmented by these multiple dimensions, giving way to a society where people are linked to selective international networks rather than local social dynamics, living alongside neighbors who are often participating in entirely different practices and traditions. The juxtaposition of Eduard's apartment and his immigrant neighbors' home in their separate high rise buildings describes an emerging cultural

topography where the public sphere is broken up into small pieces of domestic life physically disconnected from each other.

Eduard's enclosure in his rooftop apartment not only sweeps his relationship with Faridza up into the crossfire of global hostilities, but his burning frustration is then absorbed by the game, giving it emotional impact. The game, also called "Ático," becomes a global phenomenon shepherding multiple social and corporate interests, an entity much bigger than Eduard himself. His individualistic desire for fame and fortune plays him into the political-economic-cultural dynamics of what sociologist Manuel Castells (2000) terms the "network society," where individuals, groups, and even institutions are subject to the necessities of transcendent programmed objectives: "networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions" (3). With the emergence of his longings in the confines of the game it appears that "Ático" has absorbed his subjective experiences and emotions. The instrumental logic of the network society has penetrated within the subject, holding back the realization of desires and virtualizing them as affective charge for the highly profitable game.

The novel portrays a society of control, as described by Deleuze, where bio-politics is not so much concerned with the disciplining of individuals as with the modulation of affect. This is seen most poignantly in how the game's characters engage the player's emotions. "Ático" transcends the object status that traditionally characterizes videogames, as a set of predictable patterns for the player-subject to master. Lev Manovich (2002) explains that videogame players gradually become familiar with the logic of the game's algorithms, learning to anticipate what will occur in its range of variations (197). The videogame and its characters are objects that players can eventually dominate. However, "Ático," which is much beyond the capabilities of current technology, incorporates dialogues from 40,000 literary texts, as well as Eduard's own experience, all unfolding through the algorithms that guide interaction with players. The resulting dialogues blend non-sequiturs with emotionally charged conversation that draws players into the pathos of these virtual people. The game employs such complex patterns that they become barely distinguishable from the patterns of affective intensities that drive human behavior itself. As Kazuo narrates a playback of his game at a workshop for other players, they react to the situations on screen with excitement, anger, sweating, and heated debates.

Kazuo's participation as player and their responses as spectators show a profound emotional and physiological entanglement with the game.

It is rather unsettling how the game pulls both player and audience into an affective exchange with figures that are mere agglomerations of second-hand thoughts and sentiments. While those thoughts and sentiments are drawn from real subjects—Eduard, Faridza, and the writers of the books used—they combine into vacuous subjectivities that are merely a digital manifestation of complex algorithms. They are reminiscent of Kristeva's definition of the abject as a "twisted braid of thoughts and affect" lacking a definable object or subject. These videogame characters that amass and deploy affect are not exactly objects, as they cannot be mastered, nor are they autonomous subjects that, in Kristeva's words, "would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous." They manifest the persistence of affect outside any subject position and show the player's own entanglement with that "exorbitant outside" (1), thereby breaking down the walls of personal identity and pulling the player "toward the place where meaning collapses" (2).

Subjectivity is further destabilized as the game blurs the line between the two popular conceptions of virtual reality outlined by Marie Laure-Ryan (1999). She points out that the term was first used in the 1980s to describe simulated spaces, invoking the modern definition of the virtual as illusion, but its meaning shifted during the 1990s to describe navigation through the World Wide Web, as it was commonly called in those days. The virtual in this sense does not fabricate fantasy spaces but rather links and transforms relations among previously existing places, coming closer to its classical meaning of potentialities highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari. In the first conception virtual reality is more an object than a space, as it is finite and submitted to an absolute control, whereas physical space is by definition connected to other spaces and continually modified by these contiguous relations. The user can enter the virtual reality object and play out his or her fantasies. The second conception, on the other hand, sets up virtual reality as a spatial dimension introducing new subjective interactions and transforming existing ones. The game "Ático" at first presents virtual reality as a simulated space but it soon becomes evident that it serves to bridge different times, spaces, and subjective realities: Eduard's, Kazuo's, and the audience's. For those who enter the game, then, it hovers uncomfortably between the object-spaces of virtual fantasy and the platform for remote subjective interaction provided by the Internet. It is emblematic of the "new cultural expressions" that Castells identifies in the

“network society,” which have the “ideological and technological freedom to scan the planet and the whole history of humankind, and to integrate, and mix, in the supertext any sign from anywhere” (493). In this context of disjointed space and time players are unable to distinguish between objects of their own fantasy and expressive elements proceeding from other subjects, between emotions and desires originating in their own bodies and those of Eduard’s or other virtualized entities that have entered the game’s confines. Without these distinctions the player enters a world of undifferentiated affective intensities and experiences a decomposition of the self.

In fact, Kazuo’s game continually presents motifs of nostalgia, loss, and disintegration, which often border the abject. It begins with a view reminiscent of the exotic Moroccan environment across the street from Eduard’s terrace: “Desde la terraza se tiende un puente hacia un ático frondoso, poblado de plantas exuberantes” (27; A bridge from the terrace leads to a lush penthouse apartment, populated by exuberant plants). This idyllic location is inhabited by a nude couple that projects an image of idealized intimacy, but their utopia abruptly transforms into dystopia with the sudden appearance of helicopters firing machine guns, just as Kazuo escapes to the second rooftop terrace. Here he must negotiate with the bitter old man who attacks him with the point of the *porrón*, blinding him in one eye. In the third he meets a young man tormented by a missing lover, who gives him a piece of cake to take to the next screen then promptly commits suicide by jumping off the building. To get to the fourth screen he must cross a long pitch black tunnel where “A cada paso crepita algo bajo sus pies, quizá huesos que se parten o resquebrejan” (138; With each step something crackles under his feet, maybe bones that crack or break apart). He then passes through an oval shaped door to enter Faridza’s home, where he finds that the cake is now covered by mold. Faridza calls him Eduard, reproaches him for turning away from her long ago, and finally seduces him. The scene ends with them making love, and the screen fades in the moment of their mutual orgasms. The character in the final screen is an irritating boy who appears lonely and eager for Kazuo’s company. The final object of the game is to get a parachute here and jump down to the street. Kazuo finds it with only seconds remaining to finish the game and pushes the boy out of the way, knocking over a lamp and starting a fire, which threatens to burn up the child just as he is nearing the edge of the terrace.

The narrative of the game thus shows Kazuo continually fleeing the loneliness of these isolated characters and seeking to return to the lush

interaction of the street. The Garden of Eden scene on the first terrace is destroyed by the violent reality outside and thereafter all is nostalgia and decomposition. Kazuo himself loses vision in one eye and is completely deprived of his sight in the tunnel. These themes are related to the abject with images of sex, birth canals, death, and decay. The suicidal man and the bones Kazuo walks over suggest Kristeva's abject object par excellence: the corpse, "the border of my condition as a living being" (3). Kazuo's approach to Faridza's home through a dark tunnel and oval door recalls a vagina, as if he were entering the female body, which is also abject according to Kristeva. It represents the subjective interpenetration of pre-Oedipal existence and, mirroring the corpse, the birth canal is the border of life at its origin. Faridza's is the only home in the game without a terrace, as if it were a suffocating enclosure, an idea reinforced by the image of the moldy cake. Moreover, the screen fades with their sexual intermingling: the discharge of fluids from their bodies and the moment that could lead to the creation of another being. This abject imagery reveals the deep fears that have seeded Eduard's conflict between the pursuit of individual goals and intimacy with the other. For Kristeva, the abject inspires fear because it pierces the fiction of the free-standing subject. The prevalence of abject imagery in the game, along with Eduard's turning away from Faridza, suggests that his drive for individual accomplishment is at core a fear of self-dissolution within the embrace of the other.

Unlike Eduard, Kazuo does not ultimately turn away from the other. His adaptability and mental agility make him a champion in the game and the virtualized world it represents. However, he stops just short of winning the game, presented with an impossible dilemma just as he is preparing to jump off the building on the last screen. The little boy, perhaps the fruit of his union with Faridza, takes him by surprise by shouting his real name. He pauses at the edge of the building and sees his image reflected in a window across the street, with the kid crying behind him. His face is superimposed onto the ethical dilemma the game poses, moving him to go back and save the boy from the fire. At that moment his time runs out and Kazuo's virtual body disintegrates. One of the audience members at the workshop chides him for falling into the game's trap, sacrificing his final goal to save a boy that does not exist. "¿Estás seguro?" (235; Are you sure?) is his enigmatic response. While it is clear that Eduard turns away from the other, pursues individualism, and is sucked up into the global networks, Kazuo's ending is more ambivalent. He follows an ethic of affective engagement, does not turn his back on the other (and the self within that other, reflected in the mirror).

But, on the other hand, he does fall for the game's trick: he is "facialized" here, identified, singled out by name and image.<sup>3</sup> It is not clear whether he has proven himself worthy or he has fallen for the game's ruse after being "hailed" as a subject of moral vigilance. Within the society of control, the same affective engagement that connects us to others, that space of invitation we open up with our ears and our eyes to embrace otherness, is constantly subject to manipulation and regulation by capitalist forces.

### "*UNA BELLEZA RUSA*"—QUANTUM BEING

In "*Una belleza rusa*" (A Russian beauty 2005), affective engagement is represented symbolically by "rayos cósmicos" (cosmic rays) that threaten to break down the walls of the metaphorical home where the protagonist Olga wishes to seal her identity as a Russian beauty. Olga is a fashion model adrift in émigré communities in London, New York City, and the Catalan coastline, where social relations continually materialize and evaporate in chaotic fashion. Olga inhabits Mitchell's dynamic network geographies but longs for older forms of belonging based on boundaries and concentric circles. In a highly allegorical final scene, zombie-like creatures made of trunks and limbs sewn together emerge from the underground and invade the Mediterranean coastal town where Olga ends her days. The destruction of the protagonist's singular identity allows a monstrous multiplicity to emerge and directly face the multiple realities of her surrounding space. But this cathartic finale occurs with the gruesome deaths of both Olga and her unborn child, along with the commodification of this surrounding space, offering a highly ambivalent image of affective belonging.

As this storyline suggests, selfhood is a many-headed monster in Javier Calvo's peculiar narrative universe, which presents immersion in myth and in pop culture as an alternative to modern individualism. Characters are consumed by their obsessions with ancient deities or contemporary pop figures, both of which act as totems that provide access to millennial energies. The satirical surfaces of this author's works are thus configured as components of a complex structure aimed at penetrating the depths of cultural and spiritual dynamics. The abundant pop references are not flattened and voided of meaning, as is often said, for example, in Andy Warhol prints. They are elements that gather and broadcast affective intensities, providing portals to wells of virtual potentialities. Despite constructing grand allegories, Calvo's fiction is shrouded in ambivalence and contradiction, making interpretation almost a matter of affective response. In a review of his novel *Mundo maravilloso*



(Wonderful World 2007) in *El País*, J. Ernesto Ayala-Dip (2007) writes that novels like this one and *Ático* convey a powerful twin sensation of reality and unreality, making it difficult to know how to distinguish between them. *Mundo maravilloso* is a sprawling gangster novel taking place in a hyperconsumerist twenty-first century Barcelona, reminiscent of both film director Quentin Tarantino's pop exuberance and Spanish writer Ramón Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* vision (a grotesque caricatured depiction of reality). Ayala-Dip concludes that the ultimate aim of this novel is affective transmission: "Calvo consigue hacernos partícipes de lo mal que estamos" (Calvo manages to make us share in the feeling of our unhealthy state). This goal of making the reader participate in strong collective sensations could be applied to all of Calvo's narratives, but Ayala-Dip disregards the positive undercurrents that contrast with the novel's overall pessimistic view of society. The title *Wonderful World* is not just a caustic irony: it comes from a passage in which a character explains that the eponymous Louis Armstrong song keys us into the marvelous secret that the world really is a wonderful place. Many of the characters seem to reach their desires or destinies by the end of the novel, although they generally do not comply with conventional ideas of happiness or fulfillment. The narrative voice throughout the novel also conveys enthusiasm and fascination, even when describing cruel or pathetic scenes. In this manner, Calvo's narrative engages the reader in a kaleidoscope of affective responses—horror, disgust, pity, pleasure, joy, passion, amusement—in tints that often run together. It immerses us in an affective complexity reminiscent of Massumi's fields of immanence and collective belonging discussed in the Introduction.

While his fiction often emphasizes contextualized spaces and times, then, it does not aim to represent them as much as to build with these references machine-like assemblages that provoke affective reverberations. This is especially evident in "Una belleza rusa" and the other three novellas in the collection *Los ríos perdidos de Londres* (*The lost rivers of London*, 2005), where the narrators often present the stories themselves as magical incantations unleashing powerful forces. As opposed to the penthouse apartment in *Ático*, the sites that define these narrative architectures are frequently subterranean spaces like basements or swimming pools that harbor hidden meanings, activities, and connections. The book's title refers to a map of underground rivers buried beneath the successive layers of London's history, which a character in the story "Mary Poppins: Los ríos perdidos" ("Mary Poppins: The Lost Rivers") claims is the true map of the city and also a matrix of the world (218–219). This statement is indicative

of the mythical relations the narratives posit between characters, their immediate surroundings, and the larger world. While “Mary Poppins” follows a group of early twentieth century English intellectuals who adopt pagan mystical practices, the present-day protagonists of the book’s other three stories experience occult dimensions of reality through their contact with media images and discourses. Their modern individual identities are broken down by direct contact with the powerful energies that are buried within the spaces they inhabit.

The story of “Una belleza rusa,” like the creatures that emerge from the basement upon Olga’s death, is structured as a conjunction of different bits and pieces, an assemblage of semi-autonomous parts drawn from varied sources. The first of these sources the reader encounters, announced in an author’s note at the beginning of the book, is Vladimir Nabokov’s brief story “Krasavitsa” (“A Russian Beauty” 1973) about a young aristocrat exiled, displaced, and eventually impoverished by the Bolshevik revolution. Calvo amplifies Nabokov’s “amusing miniature” (2) into a sprawling forty-seven page narrative. He also transforms the daughter of tsarist Russia living in 1920s and 30s Germany into the daughter of a Soviet general living in post-Perestroika Europe. The surprising parallels established between the two eras, and between the two Russian elite classes, suggest a view of historical progression akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of successive assemblages of semi-autonomous parts discussed in the Introduction. New elements like the revolution and the break-up of the Soviet Union are assembled in conjunction with previously existing patterns and virtualities, rather than constituting a straight line of breaks and continuities. Similarly, the story layers elements from Nabokov’s tale with references to the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and quantum physics. These strange bedfellows compose a puzzle of discordant codes and sources.

“Una belleza rusa” can be described as both a remake and a re-translation of Nabokov’s story, drawing from the English version which was already a translation, as Calvo clarifies in an author’s note at the beginning of the book. Robert B. Ray (2001) argues—using Derridean terms—that remakes, adaptations, and translations function as “a ‘citation’ grafted into a new context and thereby inevitably refunctioned” (127). In this case Calvo grafts phrases from “A Russian Beauty” onto a new Spanish language context. The text begins with a translation of the final sentences of Nabokov’s story: “In such cases, instead of getting bogged down in guesswork, I repeat the words of the merry king in my favorite fairy tale: Which arrow flies forever? The arrow that has hit its mark” (8). Calvo

converts this glib conclusion, which precludes further discussion, into an enigma to be interrogated:

¿Cuál es la flecha que vuela para siempre? La flecha que ha alcanzado su objetivo. ¿Qué significan estas palabras? Alguien baja a toda prisa una escalera. Azulejos en las paredes. Una casa en la Costa Brava. El Mediterráneo en calma” (13; Which arrow flies forever? The arrow that has hit its mark. What do these words mean? Somebody hurries frantically down a staircase. Tiles on the walls. A house in the Costa Brava. The Mediterranean is still)

The narrator immediately distances himself from the citation and it is left hanging over the Catalan coastline, which is itself conveyed through choppy images that do not build a complete picture. “Una belleza rusa” echoes Robert Stam’s (2005) definition of adaptation as a “meeting ground of different species” (2), but blocks the expectation that these different species will fuse into a unified narrative voice, focusing more on the textures and affective currents of the meeting ground than on the “species” that have been brought together.

Likewise, the different component parts that make up the story are so heterogeneous that they could never merge into a seamless whole. As with Deleuze’s conception of the assemblage, the story is made up of successive moments of “territorialization” and “deterritorialization.” The former are processes that increase the internal homogeneity of elements, making the assemblage more coherent, while the latter are processes that destabilize its organization, blurring and modifying boundaries (DeLanda 2006, 13). The major theme from Nabokov’s story, injected into this new one, is the concept of Russia as a woman, a recurrent trope in the Russian author’s early narrative (Johnson 2005). This essentialist motif, implying an ordered world of distinct cultural geographies, is deterritorialized in Calvo’s version by the quantum physics notion of the indeterminacy of matter, which is employed as a metaphor for the global environment the “Russian Beauty” now inhabits. An ambiguous supernatural dimension is then thrown into the mix with references to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a show about “post-modern teens dealing with premodern monsters” (Owen 1999, 24–25).<sup>4</sup> The story thus draws a link between the challenges that both cutting edge science and ancient superstitious beliefs present to a modern rational view of the world where Olga’s subjectivity could be entirely shaped by her identity as a Russian beauty. In this way Nabokov’s essentialist metaphor of national identity is re-territorialized within Olga’s struggle against

indeterminacy, which becomes representative of the globalized world we inhabit: “La vida de nuestra heroína ha transcurrido según el estilo de su época. Esa es la pieza que falta en la historia. Este es el momento en que los sabios miran el cielo” (43; The life of our heroine has occurred in full accord with the style of the period. That is the missing piece in the story. This is the moment that the wise men look up to the sky).

However, the evident sarcasm in these phrases subverts the allegorical character of the text. We can perceive two voices: the first indicates the message the story should convey and the second unravels that message even as it is being delivered. This ironic second voice is typical of the movements of deterritorialization occurring throughout the narrative, creating a continuous interplay between meaning and non-meaning. Olga’s story is related out of chronological order in short scenes without immediately apparent connecting elements between them, as if they were arranged haphazardly. Moreover, the narrator insists that the story has no representational significance, and that the answers to questions like Nabokov’s presented at the beginning cannot be found within the story (21–22, 37). In one scene, located in the basement of Olga’s high school, where she and her friends have gone to drink vodka and sniff cocaine clandestinely, the narrator tells us that stories also need locations that block the production of meaning:

donde toda metaforicidad quede cancelada ... Es conveniente que dichas partes de la historia no tengan ninguna relación con el resto de las partes de la historia, y también que las situaciones descritas allí no sean extrapolables a ninguna otra situación. (21; where all metaphoricity is canceled out ... These parts of the story must not have any relation with the other parts of the story, and the situations described there must not be able to be extrapolated to any other situation.)

The story is described as a dynamic physical structure, with clear passages and blocked areas, assembled from different component parts that intermittently bind together and come apart.

This assemblage structure is related to the chaotic reality Olga inhabits, haunted by a persistent sense of lack, which stems from her inability to establish affective connections with others. In one scene from her childhood, where she wanders around her labyrinthine family estate, the narrator claims the story is a Russian garden: “La historia es un jardín.

Este tendría que haber sido el comienzo. Un jardín ruso, imponente y caótico y cubierto de hojas secas” (36; The story is a garden. This should have been the beginning. A Russian garden, imposing and chaotic and covered with dry leaves). She runs around the garden and finds herself returning again and again to the same places, often to where an immobile gardener waters a bush, his eyes hidden behind impenetrable dark glasses. Her father is seen on the balcony of the house talking on the phone. There is a palpable sense of childhood neglect in these descriptions of the adults present in the scene, reinforced later by the revelation that Olga’s mother abandoned her as a baby. Olga is left alone to seek answers in the garden, carrying a butterfly net, a clear allusion to Nabokov and his questions quoted at the beginning. But she will find no answers here, “Porque la historia es un jardín, y un jardín no es ninguna pregunta. Un jardín es un jardín” (37; Because the story is a garden, and a garden is not a question. A garden is a garden).

As an adult, Olga still has trouble establishing affective connections with others and depends entirely on her beauty and wealth in social interactions, creating an aggressive and attractive shell that hides a desperate interior. This lack of attachment is related to her aimless wandering and questioning. In fact, a sense of direction (Nabokov’s arrow) is found in the scene where Olga’s childhood friend Vera sees her in New York, a chance encounter that leads to Vera taking Olga under her wings and guiding her recovery from drug addiction. The scene is portrayed as a series of overlapping flows: Vera emerges from a phone booth with a terrier and several shopping bags under her arms and crashes into her old friend. Olga keeps moving, “buscando perderse entre la multitud” (trying to lose herself in the crowd), but is stopped by the timbre of Vera’s voice calling her name, which awakens “ecos en las circunvoluciones de su cerebro” (31; echoes in the circumvolutions of her brain). The layered currents on the city street—Vera struggling to carry her load, the crowd moving down the sidewalk, the circumvolutions of Olga’s brain—are interrupted and change course due to the abrupt crash of two bodies, a random event which is said to exemplify the functioning of the Russian garden:

Y es así como las distintas partes del jardín se relacionan entre ellas: ensamblándose y desensamblándose, suplementándose y superponiéndose. Y una vez desaparecidas las normas de la causalidad, el sentido de dirección emerge de nuevo. Poderoso. Rotundo. Ineluctable. (32; And that is how the different parts of the garden relate to each other: joining together and

splitting apart, replacing and superimposing each other. And once the norms of causality vanish, a sense of direction emerges again. Powerful. Emphatic. Inexorable.)

Vera pulls Olga into the currents of affective intensity that connect movements, brainwaves, memories, and emotional responses. A sense of direction can be discovered in the chaotic movements bringing these different parts of the “garden” together, when one stops asking their meaning and causes, opening the self up to affective belonging and the stable attachments to others that psychologist John Bowlby (Bowlby 1997; Cassidy and Shaver 2008) argues is the key to personal development, as discussed in Chap. 1.

However, Olga encloses herself within her identity as a Russian beauty, unwilling or unable to face the world of affective currents outside. In one passage she wonders how she could define Russia and finds it to be an elusive idea, built of scattered memories and associations that do not constitute a coherent entity. Finally she concludes that it is a house designed to shelter her from the outer chaos:

Y el mundo está encerrado fuera de esa casa. Y ella está dentro de la casa, rompiendo muebles a hachazos y usando los tablones para apuntalar puertas y ventanas, o bien tapando rendijas de las paredes, o cegando ventanas con cortinas de tela opaca. La razón de esta actividad no es otra que los rayos cósmicos. Los rayos cósmicos no se ven ni tampoco se notan en la piel. Sin embargo, existen, y están por todas partes, allí donde llega la luz del sol. La casa es la única protección posible. Una casa impermeable a la luz natural. (45; And the world is shut outside that house. And she is inside the house, breaking furniture with an axe and using boards to shore up doors and windows, or covering cracks in the walls, or blinding windows with opaque cloth curtains. The reason for this activity is none other than the cosmic rays. The cosmic rays cannot be seen or felt on the skin. However, they exist, and they are all over, wherever the sun reaches. The house is the only possible protection. A house that is impermeable to natural light.)

The concept of Russia for her, as a homeland or a store of identity, is nothing more than a protective seal from affective currents, or what she calls the cosmic rays. Like a vampire unable to face the light, she cannot face the overwhelming multiplicity of the outside world.

Olga's dependence on the walls that protect identity comes into conflict with a social geography organized around dynamic intertwined networks.

She seeks out isolated comfort zones through drug use, the cultivation of her outer beauty, and ties to her homeland, but these artificial boundaries are constantly threatened by the chaos outside. When she moves to London she joins a crowd of extravagant Russian expatriates who dedicate their lives to wild parties and conspicuous consumption. Not only do they live outside any integrated dynamic of social and economic relations with regards to the rest of the city but according to the narrator they inhabit a mythical time called the “Edad de Oro” (Golden Age), where everything is much larger and more beautiful than in ordinary times, where it is always Spring, music is always playing, and nobody has to work (23). In the middle of one of their parties Olga is seen at the top of the diving board observed by admirers below:

Permanece así un momento, magnífica, dominando el jardín desde sus alturas olímpicas, encerrada en una burbuja de tiempo y espacio. No hay nada a su alrededor, no hay nadie, la fiesta no existe ... Perfecta en su belleza, pues han dejado de existir otras bellezas. Perfecta en su unicidad. (24; She lingers there a moment, magnificent, dominating the garden from her Olympic heights, enclosed in a bubble of time and space. There is nothing around her, there is nobody, the party does not exist ... Perfect in her beauty, as other beauties have ceased to exist. Perfect in her oneness.)

She is separated from her surroundings, looming in a “time-space bubble” of her unique identity as *the* Russian beauty. Within the bubble of Russian émigrés she resides in an even smaller bubble. Employing the vocabulary of Bowlby’s attachment theory, we could say that this extreme individualism is connected to an avoidant attachment style rooted in childhood neglect. She needs proximity to a community but encloses herself within a protective patina of autonomy that paradoxically feeds off the group’s attention.

However, this community quickly fades, leaving no trace, and Olga is left stranded. Nabokov’s Olga experiences a rather sudden change of circumstances when her father’s death leaves her poor and she stops seeing her friends: “But presently her life darkened. Something was finished, people were getting up to leave. How quickly!” (6). The corresponding passage in Calvo’s story suggests even more diffuse relations among events, spaces, and social groups. Nabokov’s image of people hurriedly leaving a party is replaced by a description of the party itself dissolving:

La noche, en el momento de tocar a su fin, se funde con el resto de las noches de la historia. Como coordenadas temblorosas de un mapa cuántico, los instantes de la fiesta empiezan a disgregarse incluso antes de cobrar existencia. (26; The night, at the moment it comes to an end, melds with the rest of the story's nights. Like flickering coordinates on a quantum map, the party's instants begin to disintegrate even before coming into being.)

The first sentence here suggests how memory blurs different moments and events into an indistinguishable continuum, in this case aided by bountiful drug use. The second, though, tells us that in Olga's world the very experience of reality anticipates the hazing effect of later memories. Time behaves like a set of flickering coordinates on a quantum map rather than unfolding along a straight line. Not only do Olga's Russian friends live outside any rooted relation to the rest of the city, but their continual celebrations occur as a series of indistinguishable moments that dissolve just as they are coming into being.

In the global cities and émigré communities Olga inhabits, social groupings appear and disappear without warning, leaving her open to the surrounding chaos. We next see her at a Russian discotheque in New York, in a neighborhood which the narrator explains is one of those identified by acronyms: "neologismos destinados a crear corrientes multi-direccionales de complicidad" (neologisms invented to create multi-directional currents of complicity).<sup>5</sup> Olga is on the outside of these currents and, in contrast to her conspicuous position at the center of the party, here she cannot even get the bartender's attention for a glass of water:

Hay problemas para llamar la atención de la gente, esta noche, aquí y ahora, y nuevamente la atmósfera del club de baile parece sugerir una especie de dispersión cuántica: nadie parece vivir en el mismo instante, nadie parece estar bailando la misma canción ... vuelve a adentrarse en la pista de baile, en busca de algo o de alguien, pero en su intento descubre algo inesperado: una serie de dimensiones inesperadas, ensamblándose y desensamblándose. Emergiendo como hongos sobre el cadáver de la causalidad. Así, no existen dos momentos en que se produzca la misma disposición de bailarines sobre la pista, y *simultáneamente*, existen ilimitados momentos en los que la disposición permanece estable. (40, emphasis in the original; It is hard to get anyone's attention, tonight, here and now, and the atmosphere of the dance club once again suggests a sort of quantum dispersion: nobody seems to be living in the same moment, nobody seems to be dancing to the same song ... she goes back onto the dance floor, in search of something or someone, but



in her attempt she discovers something unexpected: a series of unexpected dimensions, joining together and splitting apart. Emerging like mushrooms over the corpse of causality. As such, there do not exist any two moments that produce the same arrangement of dancers on the dance floor, and *simultaneously*, there exist an unlimited number of moments in which the arrangement remains the same.)

She experiences the dance floor as a flood of disjunctive stimuli that cannot be pieced together into an ordered whole. She is assaulted by the spectacle of multiple unrealities unfolding with no cause and effect links between them. This passage describes both the sensation of unreality that often precedes an epileptic attack, which Olga suffers in the following paragraph, and the visual impression of unreality created by discontinuous lighting and mind-altering drugs in dance clubs. However, as part of Olga's progressive disconnection from her surroundings, these neurological effects are representative of the contemporary subject's fractured experience of space and time. Cities are made up of separate bubbles of neighborhoods and social gatherings that come and go in rapid succession. Fractured cultural formations sprout in unpredictable patterns like mushrooms over a terrain where cause and effect have been vanquished.

The narrator relates these social-psychological realities to quantum physics, reflecting Mitchell's argument that the world today follows the "notoriously strange spatial and temporal logic of quantum mechanics (rather than the familiar logic of the everyday world)" (14). Quantum theory attempts to account for the strange behavior of the atomic realm, which disrupts the ordered functioning of Newtonian classical mechanics. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, physics was able to explain material reality as a series of causes and effects occurring within a linear time scheme (Tegmark 2003, 46). This comfortable order was torn apart by the observation of highly counterintuitive phenomena, such as particles that act as waves or skip from one orbit to another without passing through the intermediate space (Tegmark and Wheeler 2001, 69–70). To explain these phenomena physicist Hugh Everett put forward a controversial "many-worlds interpretation," which conceptualizes a "multiverse" of superimposed classical universes. According to this theory all possibilities of what may occur at any given moment come into being simultaneously in parallel universes. An infinite number of alternative versions of our selves exist in universes that realize different possible outcomes. We can only observe quantum multiplicity in tiny matter that is separated from the

environment in experimental conditions, but our classical universe (or the separate classical universes that we inhabit with each passing moment) functions as part of a larger quantum multiverse (Tegmark, 46–48).

The story's "Russian Garden" structure replicates this quantum dispersion that threatens to break apart Olga's metaphorical home of national and individual identity. The rupture with rational space and time, however, provides an opening to a pagan spirituality that could reconnect the self with the dynamic currents of the multiverse. In the hospital after her epileptic attack, Olga sees the traditional Russian demon the *Baba Yaga*. In another passage the narrator explains that there can be no "conocimiento esotérico" (esoteric knowledge) of the universe as a whole, since demons and hells are unlimited and exist simultaneously:

no existen dos momentos del multiverso en los que haya el mismo número de demonios. Y por la misma razón, existen ilimitados momentos en los que ese número permanece constante. (there do not exist any two moments of the multiverse in which there are the same number of demons. And for the same reason there exist an unlimited number of moments in which that number remains constant.)

Employing Everett's term multiverse and the same phrasing used to describe the Manhattan dance club, the narrator connects quantum mechanics to a pagan view of spirituality. In the next paragraph he opposes this "Russian Garden" view of the multiverse to a classical rational view—"un conglomerado cuasivación de energía y materia" (a semi-empty conglomerate of energy and material)—and to Christian monotheism—"explicaciones arcanas relacionadas con serpientes, desnudez y frutos prohibidos" (30; arcane explanations related to serpents, nudity and forbidden fruits).

However, as in *Ático*, this same space of affective belonging is already colonized by capitalism. The global cities with their dynamic currents are domains of trendy neighborhoods and floods of money from places like Russia, where the break-up of the Soviet empire led to the quasi-legal, or directly illegal, ransacking of State properties (Stiglitz 2003, 133–165). The narrator also tells us that the story is sponsored by Superlanguage, which uses the latest "psychopedagogical" techniques in language learning (13, 39, 52–53). Olga's difficulty with languages, dating back to her childhood, is a symbol of her isolation throughout the story. In the high school basement scene her friend Katya tells her that according to all major

religions it is the soul that learns language, so Olga must be lacking a soul (20). The ironic notion that the story is sponsored by a language school suggests that this theme is shaped to accentuate the advantages of its psychopedagogical methods. This is another moment of deterritorialization that threatens to undermine the symbolic thrust of the story. The ground we as readers tread is as shiftily as the reality Olga inhabits.

Both the basement scene and Olga's fascination with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* also connect neo-pagan spirituality to the capitalist harnessing of affective forces. Olga and her friends are listening to Scandinavian gothic metal sold in stands outside their elite boarding school, sniffing lines of cocaine off a Ouija board while Katya intones in German "O geist kommt zu mir" (20; Oh spirit comes to me). This consumerist adolescent escape from "los mecanismos de vigilancia institucional" (19; the mechanisms of institutional vigilance) is echoed in her later bulimic ritual of watching *Buffy* with London modeling friends, "tardes orgiásticas de televisión y carbohidratos" (43; orgiastic afternoons of television and carbohydrates). Here again appears a space blocked off from institutional discipline, where Olga ingests prohibited substances and seeks an affective connection to a commercialized form of pre-modern magic and myth. Nevertheless, these consumer-based escape rituals reveal the emptiness of her normal existence, and the show *Buffy* in fact leads her to that realization. She sees a reflection of her own experience in the character Angel, a powerful vampire cursed by a group of gypsies with the affliction of having a soul, which makes him repent for all his bloody deeds.<sup>6</sup> Olga is struck by the fact that having a soul would make him "aquella sombra estólida de un hombre ... Débil y apesumbrado" (that dull shadow of a man ... Weak and pitiful) and that when he loses his soul he once again becomes "aquel ser repentinamente cargado de energía, sensual y atrevido, inteligente y voraz" (that being suddenly charged with energy, sensual and daring, intelligent and voracious). She considers this apparent contradiction a "nodo de vacío" (node of emptiness) residing in "los ojos de Angel" (44; Angel's eyes). She relates the absence of her mother, the elusiveness of Russia as an idea and the node of emptiness in Angel's eyes to "el foco de su propia ausencia" (45; the focus of her own absence).

The concept of soul as an openness to the outside world is opposed to Olga's self-enclosed identity as a Russian beauty. She comes to realize that Russia is an empty idea meant to protect her from the chaos of the world she inhabits, which would penetrate an inner core that is ultimately a node of emptiness, leaving her weak and downtrodden like Angel. Her empty

subjectivity is reminiscent of Sánchez Ferlosio's idea of the cultural logic of empty boxes. While it would seem she should cast off this vacuous shell, the option presents her with a Lacanian sense of lack, as brilliantly described in Slavoj Žižek's (2006) analysis of the void the subject discovers when its symbolic identifications with the world are pierced. He discusses the passage from Shakespeare's *Richard II* where the monarch is forced to give up the crown and finds that the hollowness of this royal symbol only masks the even greater hollowness that he finds when relinquishing its power. Žižek observes: "getting rid of this unsubstantial specter does not leave us with the simple reality of what we effectively are ... all reality is an effect of anamorphosis, a 'shadow of nothing,' and what we get if we look at it 'straight on' is a chaotic nothing" (70). Coming to terms with the emptiness of her identifications does not face Olga with reality as it is but rather exiles her to the chaos and uncertainty reigning outside the symbolic structure.

Nevertheless, if she could make the jump from this realization to an embrace of indeterminacy, and the multiplicity of otherness, perhaps she would find the world of affective belonging that was sealed off during her lonely childhood. It is not necessary to see Olga's lack as an inherent condition of humanity's symbolic world; it is rather symptomatic of modern and postmodern individualism. Her interior is symbolically bridged to the outside when the *Buffy* monsters break out of the underground and take over the coastal town. Her perfect self-enclosed beauty is ruptured by the ugly patchwork bodies of the monsters inside. The subject is annihilated as an individual and simultaneously brought into being as a burgeoning assemblage, linked to the abject images of her death and miscarriage: "de entre sus piernas mana sin parar la sangre y también algo más. Algo viscoso y lleno de cosas sólidas" (55; blood flows out from between her legs along with something else. Something slimy and full of solid things). The undead monsters are associated with her child and also, recalling Žižek's reading of *Alien* and other horror films, represent a crude life force that transcends and destroys individualization:

La trampilla del sótano estalla en pedazos y por el hueco asoma una maraña de brazos ansiosos. Brazos acabados en garras y brazos sin piel y brazos con la piel del color del moho. Los brazos se agitan y forcejean con la furia voraz de un recién nacido ... Varios cuerpos emergen a la superficie, algunos incompletos, con mordeduras sanguinolentas y con llagas abiertas de las que rezuma limo amarillo. (55; The basement's trapdoor explodes into pieces and

a tangle of anxious arms appear in the opening. Arms ending in hooks and arms without skin and mold-colored arms. The arms toss and struggle with the voracious fury of a newborn ... Various bodies emerge onto the surface, some of them incomplete, with bloody bite marks and open wounds that ooze a yellow slime.)

The emergence of these incomplete, mutilated bodies signals the return of a repressed undifferentiated Real, visible only in the cracks or the void behind the symbolic system through which Olga relates to her surroundings. They are like Lacan's "lamella," the pure libido life force which is repressed through the subject's entry into a symbolic order. For Žižek the living corpses and body parts from horror films represent this force: "A lamella is indivisible, indestructible, and immortal - more precisely, undead in the sense this term has in horror fiction ... the obscene immortality of the 'living dead' which, after every annihilation, re-composes themselves and clumsily goes on" (62).

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis such terrifying or joyful intimations of the self's essential lack are inevitable as a basic irrepressible libido always struggles to break through our individualized identities. However, "Una belleza rusa" confronts us with a social context where constructions of individual identity—epitomized in Olga's self-image as a Russian beauty—appear ever more vacuous and the void constantly haunts subjects. The emergence of these creatures is not a temporary spate of evil before the town returns to normal like in most horror films. Here it is definitive and even celebratory:

Cuando el primero de ellos abre la puerta del jardín, sus gargantas llenas de limo emiten un aullido colectivo de miedo. Los rayos cósmicos. Luego el que ha abierto la puerta mira por entre los dedos y por fin se aparta las manos de la cara. Contempla el jardín. Hay un mundo ahí fuera, un mundo nuevo. Sale al jardín, seguido por sus hermanos y hermanas. (When the first one opens the door to the garden, their slime-covered throats let out a collective frightened howl. The cosmic rays. Then the one who has opened the door looks between his fingers and finally takes his hands off his face. He takes in the garden. There is a world out there, a new world. He goes out to the garden, followed by his brothers and sisters.)

This multitude of brothers and sisters overcomes its fear of the cosmic rays and embraces the world outside. The narrator calls their emergence "el inicio de una nueva era" (56; the beginning of a new age).

The new era is not only defined by multiplicity and collective belonging though. The landscape the zombies discover is also dominated by a blimp floating above the sea advertising the Superlanguage academy, an image that imposes itself on all the characters. Olga's husband Forstmann sees it repeatedly as he drives her to the hospital, and the narrator states that it is "probablemente la última imagen memorable que su mujer va a ver en su vida" (53; probably the last memorable image that his wife is going to see in her life). Some of the creatures emerging from the basement also point towards it. For Vera the blimp is a revelation when Forstmann calls her and she looks out the window as she listens to him: "se tapa la boca y comprende que la historia ha estado patrocinada desde el principio" (54; she covers her mouth and comprehends that the story has been sponsored since the beginning).

On many levels, then, the symbolic walls between the different compartments of the story are broken down in this scene, evoking a generalized chaos and loss of meaning. Paradoxically, though, the narrator claims that now everything is becoming clear: "Ahora estamos por fin preparados para entender la importancia de todo esto. Ahora sabemos lo de los jardines rusos y lo del teléfono en la mano del padre y muchas cosas más" (53–54; Now we are at last ready to understand the importance of all of this. Now we know about the Russian gardens and the telephone in the father's hand and many more things). The creatures represent the "powerful sense of direction" sprouting over the corpse of causality, which emerges in an embrace of the unfathomable totality of existence. They reflect an alternative causality based on what Deleuze calls "efficient causes," which construct relations from the encounter of material bodies in real spaces, as opposed to transcendental "final and formal causes," which structure events and meaning from teleological foundations (Hardt, xv). Deleuze and Guattari (2013) claim that the subject will gain no understanding from asking transcendental questions: "Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions" (25). In the Russian Garden, there are no answers to these classic questions that formulate identity projects; Nabokov's arrow fades just as it is coming into being. Instead, direction can be found in the overlapping circumvolutions that trace one's connection to the past, to the present, and to the eternal (as occurs to Olga when she runs into Vera).

However, this quantum realm of materiality is also the domain of Deleuze's society of control, where subjectivity is broken down into quantifiable pieces. The subject that embraces affective engagement of his

or her environment must also recognize how these affects are modulated and regulated by corporate and state interests. In *Ático*, Kazuo confronts the emotional manipulation of a virtual boy within a videogame. In “Una belleza rusa,” the brotherly and sisterly monsters that emerge from Olga’s interior point at the blimp hanging over their new world, and Vera comes to the shocking realization that the story has been sponsored all along. But those who remain within their isolated homes of individuality, like Eduard and Olga, are manipulated to an equal or even greater degree by these forces of quantification. They believe themselves to be perfect in their uniqueness, to be forging individual paths of accomplishment, but they are only riding the waves of capitalist speculation, greed, and insatiable desire. These affects fill the empty boxes they inhabit.

The hints of true affective belonging offered by the character of Kazuo or Olga’s monsters are tenuous and highly symbolic. They show the difficulty of leaving the vacuous shell of individual identity and embracing a shared space: a space where the abject and capitalist commodification lurk. Likewise, the *Indignados* movement in Spain, discussed at the beginning of the chapter, recognized that their shared spaces of invitation were a necessarily temporary experiment and that the competitive and unequal society outside would soon encroach upon them. They dismantled the tent cities and resolved to undertake the more complex and fitful project of spreading the alternative cultural modes germinated there to other sectors of society. Calvo and Martínez’s narrations also dismantle themselves continuously. They do not build a heroic image, a pure fantasy of belonging. Instead they deploy a range of discourses and affective currents, woven into monstrous assemblages that seek to confront the reader with the wondrous and terrifying multiplicity of the contemporary world.

Ayala-Dip, the book reviewer quoted at the beginning of this chapter, argues that fictions like *Ático* and *Mundo maravilloso* frame classic literary themes within hyperreality, invoking the widespread idea that postmodern society blurs the lines between the real (the material) and the unreal (fantasy, the imaginary). This view is supported by the end of “Una belleza rusa,” where the narrator states that if the story were a movie, one of the creatures would turn to the camera, in a grainy handheld shot reminiscent of low-budget films, and say “A la mierda la fantasía” (56; Fuck fantasy). There is no fantasy here, no distinction between the material and the imagined. Images, events, and ideas are swept into narrative assemblages: Nabokov’s nostalgic idea of the lost Russian beauty is joined here with postmodern ghouls and counterintuitive science, mutating into a novella,

which is finally summed up in a handheld shot of this abject beast. However, these stories seek to foment affective engagement, as opposed to the apathetic disengagement often associated with hyperreality. They suggest that what appears to be the unreal of hyperreality is perhaps that field of immanence where we experience our belonging to the world and to others. Rather than a vacuous screen we see something that is simultaneously a reflecting mirror and a window to the complexity of otherness—where the self and the other are constructed in tandem from the same fungible materiality.

## NOTES

1. The society of control concept is discussed further in Chap. 4, in relation to self-stylization consumer culture.
2. See the Chap. 1 for a discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, as developed by Manuel DeLanda (2006).
3. 'Faciality' will be discussed further in the next chapter, with reference to Captain Vidal from *El laberinto del fauno*. It is Deleuze and Guattari's (2013) term for how modernity filters the self's interaction with the world through the individualizing characteristics of the human face: the "white wall of signification" across the skin and "black holes of subjectivity" in the eyes. They contrast this facialization with the "body-head system" of pre-modern societies (192–223).
4. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ran on a cable network from 1996 to 2003, becoming a cult classic with a relatively large and very devoted following. The protagonist Buffy is an ordinary American high school girl saddled with the enormous responsibility of saving the world from vampires and other evildoers, which she shares with her two best friends. The trio is socially marginalized within their peer group and largely misunderstood by the show's adult figures, who are unaware of their heroic activities or in many cases turn out to be evil themselves. The program is an ironic take on horror genres and on the tribulations faced by middle-class adolescents.
5. The narrator is referring to lower Manhattan neighborhoods like Tribeca (Triangle below Canal Street), Nolita (North of Little Italy), Soho (South of Houston Street), and Noho (North of Houston Street).
6. In the program Buffy finds a lone sympathetic adult and vampire in Angel, who helps her defeat other vampires. However, as part of the gypsy's spell he will lose his soul again if he experiences a moment of true happiness, which occurs when he initiates a romantic relationship with Buffy. He then becomes an evil character that Buffy must kill.



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