If These Walls Could Talk: Leonora Carrington's Psycho-Spatial Rooms

Thus we cover the universe with drawings we have lived.
Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

*The **in-between**, formed by juxtapositions and experiments,*
*formed by realignments or new arrangements, threatens to **open itself up as a new,***
to facilitate transformations in the identities that constitute it.
Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*

The poetry of intensity

Leonora Carrington was a master of the line - from the rigorous training in pencil drawing she received at Amédée Ozenfant's London Academy at the beginning of her artistic career, through the topographical representation of her captivity in the aerial map of 'Down Below' (c. 1940-41; 2017, 36), to the exquisitely detailed skeletal creatures and objects of her late paintings. Leonora resisted the rules of mimetic representation though its very own formal components, pushing line, scale, perspective, syntax and colour beyond boundaries. The line also enabled her to take flight with words. Across her written, painted and drawn works, limits exist to assist be pushed against, and to propel ideas and figures into another realm. The line, whether drawn by pencil, ink, or paint, invents spatial and architectural forms that both free and contain the subjects and objects of her work. She was also master of the "in-between" (Grosz, 2001) the sun-fixed self in transition and constant metamorphoses as "a dynamic and changing entity" (Braidotti 2002, 2). In particular, this chapter investigates the spatial configurations provided by dwelling places in Carrington's work. Phenomenological experience is repeatedly inscribed through her spatial investigation of rooms, chambers, and houses. Her depictions of rare and often otherworldly habitats are syncretic

condensations of moments that span across a spectrum of multi-layered time and space. They often feature lone figures "housed" in human solitude, seeming to commune with exterior worlds filled with timeless apparitions, beasts, and spirits. In his 1958 treatise on the ontology of the poetic image – *The Poetics of Space* – philosopher Gaston Bachelard maintained that such spaces in our imaginations are always located within our intimate knowledge and recollection of habitation: "Our habits of a particular daydream were acquired there. The house, the bedroom, the garret in which we were alone, furnished the frameworks for an interminable dream, one that poetry alone, through the creation of a poetic work could succeed in achieving completely. […] there exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory, that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past" (2014, 37). Without relying solely on biographical or psychoanalytical approaches to lived space as a haunted past, while acknowledging the usefulness of aspects of such approaches, this chapter explores Bachelard's ruminations on spatial phenomenology in conversation with Carrington's creative responses to the potentiality of space, both negatively and positively imagined. In line with Bachelard, it considers the significance of disruption and marginality within the creative process, in order to access the ambivalence drawn by strange and shifting boundaries in Carrington's oeuvre: "With poetry, the imagination takes its place on the margin, exactly where the function of unreality comes to charm or to disturb – always to awaken – the sleeping being lost in its automatisms" (Bachelard, 2014, 19). It is my contention that Carrington's startlingly frank and instinctual work offers much that is of central concern to contemporary studies in female phenomenology, the female avant-garde, and psycho-spatial theory.

It is perhaps, then, a fairly instinctual link that ties Bachelard's philosophy of the spatial imagination with the imaginative dynamics of Carrington's oeuvre, looking forward to

contemporary feminist philosophies of space such as those of Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, or Jane Bennett. Each is linked through their personal theory of the composite temporality of the instant, as well as a consideration of *Being* in relation to cosmographical, topographical and phenomenological systems. Although I draw on Bachelard's philosophy throughout, it is also clearly important to signal Carrington's specifically female encounter with space. Where Bachelard largely explores the work of male artists and writers to support his theories, Leonora brings the vantage point of female intellect, and an embodied female experience having occupied a marginalised and interstitial social position. She resists her femaleness from within the corporeal and socio-cultural musculature of patriarchal power, breaking through the metaphorical walls of the proper English home, the school convent, or the asylum. Bachelard's philosophy then, should be seen *through* Carrington's work, which, from its female-centred enquiry into *becoming*, augments and enriches the ideas active in *The Poetics of Space,* and its principal themes: the primal or childhood home; disorder and rebellion; and, the intimate and immense space of the daydream.

Carrington's vast body of work is supported by an intricate, oft-repeating framework, which emerges from her instinctual response to space and place. Natural and human-built architectural forms – caves, castles, glass conservatories, churches, passageways, rock formations – provide shelter, enforce decorum or captivity, obscure and reveal hidden entities, and allow for less distinct forms such as pools of light, water, air, smoke, or signs of otherworldly presence to congregate. More specifically, shadows of the past are often directly or abstractly referenced in images of places that Leonora inhabited, such as her childhood home at Crookhey Hall in Lancashire, or the Santander asylum where she was treated for a breakdown, memorialised in *Down Below* [1944]. The written account of her incarceration expresses vividly what Bachelard characterises as inhabiting with intensity. Iterations of such potently remembered spaces recur

through each of her chosen creative mediums, with newly mysterious and marvellous affects. Both Bachelard and Carrington evince a philosophical sensitivity to the apprehension of space, and each draw on a multiplicity of references and intertexts in order to better express the state of "housed" daydreaming.

Bachelard couches the idea of the poetic image in terms that highlight its primacy: it exists prior to thought; it is "a phenomenology of the soul"; regardless of its history or provenance, the poetic image is always new to us and eludes causality; "it is a space of experiment" and "pure imagination" (2014, 4). In order to study this poetics of space, Bachelard alights on the marginal and dynamic creative space occupied by the artist, which he identifies as being in a constant state of flux, infused by a past that is repeatedly reinvented via the imagination. Carrington is often associated with the *actual* artistic space of her studio in Mexico City. However, her work is also populated with *oneiric* artistic spaces conjured through processes of daydreaming or alchemical transmutation. Often relating to actual places encountered in Carrington's past, houses and rooms exist in a Bachelardian present tense, within which recurring figures freely associate. Memory is malleable, unreliable, permeable, but always steered by the primacy of the poetic soul. For example, the reader finds herself *in medias res* at a "neo-Gothic" house in the opening section of Carrington's novel *The Stone Door* (1976)[i] falling into an associative stream of images: "My memory twitches into a sharp image of something never seen, yet remembered and so acutely alive that I am possessed. A pine forest white with snow in a country where the people are dressed in bright colors. A noise of smashed glass" (Carrington 1978, 13). Here, a tactile memory combines sight and sound in arresting juxtaposition. The description of the scene illustrates the intricate bond between lived and fantasised existence, which, as Bachelard suggests involves a sensory reverberation of powerful, poetic images. In his foreword to 'The House of Fear,'

Leonora's then lover Max Ernst, writes that: "She warms herself with her intense life, her mystery, her poetry" (Ernst, 1989, 26). Her poetry resides in the brilliant condensation and expansion of sensory recollections.

Carrington, "a polymath, whose "body of art and writing is at once anachronistic and resiliently contemporary," (Eburne and McAra, 1-2) inhabits the Bachelardian space of "pure imagination," while her work speaks to the recurring instant of existence as a spatial realm. Indeed, in the short story 'The Skeleton's Holiday', 'The skeleton's lodgings had an ancient head and modern feet' (2017, 38). In Carrington's realm we may recognise the temporal markers of subject-hood – childhood memories, self-portraiture, exile, traumatic incarceration, friendship, motherhood, and belief systems – but any notion of fixity is dispersed into the amorphous and airy world-spaces that suggest an atemporal potentiality of becoming. Recurrent poetic images such as the white horse, the mirror, the deep forest, or the circular chamber, illustrate the importance of the paradoxical specificity of a past that is always startlingly fresh and suggestive of the future. As the Artisan in *The Stone Door* asserts, "It is a: prejudice that makes us conceive time as a straight line […] or as any line at all, from a corkscrew to a zig-zag, or a circle or anything really" (Carrington, 1978, 37). The novel is a vast and twisting adventure "errant in time and space," (1978, 22) and crammed with burgeoning philosophies of rebirth, the ideal hermaphrodite self, and the cosmos. Carrington crafts an ever-expanding series of embryonic spaces and shapes, by turns shadowy and luminescent, which open into parallel universes: "It is true that there is an infinite empty space somewhere beyond the Universe. It is equally true that that space is as richly peopled and inhabited as this very Earth" (1978, 22). Carrington's work often features wheels, labyrinths, and windows, which denote spatio-temporal movement. I would argue, however, that the most powerful evocation of poetic space is the concept of an unending chamber-space, such as

that evoked in *The House Opposite* (1945, below). Rooms become worlds, simultaneously creating a dynamic centrifugal and centripetal energy that captures Bachelard's intense and instantaneous *present moment*, and exceeds the parameters of the frame or paragraph. But in contrast to Bachelard's verticality, where the house is imagined running from attic to cellar, Carrington's house is spherical and elliptica

The relational dynamics of poetic space

In the BBC's *Omnibus* documentary *Leonora Carrington: The House of* Fear, aired on the 10th November, 1992, Leonora poses the question "Do you think anyone escapes their childhood?" – a pertinent line of investigation for an artist who frequently revisits her own in stories such as 'The Debutante', 'The Oval Lady', or 'Jemima and the Wolf' (1937-38)[ii], and in paintings such as *Crookhey Hall* (1947) *Green Tea (La Dame ovale,* 1942) *The Hour of the Angelus* (1949) and *Night Nursery Everything* (1948). Bachelard posits that the home in which we grow up 'is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (2014, 26). He argues that when humans build shelter the process is primarily one in which the imagination plays the largest role, comforting with the illusion of protection. The subject, he says, 'experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality by means of thoughts and dreams […] Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days' (2014, 27-28). This reasoning forms an anti-narrative divested of chronological time, in which the act of daydreaming both in these actual habitations and in retrospective remembering of them, forms a composite and morphing space based simultaneously in reality and unreality. While Bachelard primarily focuses on the 'felicitous space' (2014, 19) of this first universe, Carrington dwells on the restrictive and violent aspects of Crookhey Hall. Susan Aberth notes the psychological impact that this "Gothic-revival mansion" had on the young Leonora between the years of 1920 and 1927, positing that the edifice

came to embody a range of symbolic associations: "from a forbidding and restrictive prison that represented parental authority to the mysterious state of childhood itself" (2004, 11). The sheer scale of this enormous house and its sombre rooms, where the children could disappear into solitude and daydreaming, clearly embedded itself into Leonora's capacious imagination, as did the family's subsequent Victorian country mansion, Hazelwood Hall, in Morecambe (to which they moved in 1927). Bachelard warns us that we cannot simply equate images with memories, that 'unreality' awakens our senses, and our capacity to daydream, or dream 'separates us from the past as well as from reality" (2014, 18) Aberth, from her extensive interviews with Leonora, gleans that local legends telling of witchcraft, as well as Celtic mythology and Catholic mysticism, led to "childhood paranormal experiences" in which she had visions and saw ghosts (2004, 14-15). As a result Carrington creates composite images of her home that border autobiographical and magical spheres. In the paintings cited above that feature versions of Crookhey and Hazelwood Halls, fleeing apparitions, bats, animate toys, bound and swaddled characters, and the encroachment of exterior life upon the domestic, give form to the idea of growing up, or becoming-self. In 'The House of Fear,' the castle is "built with stones that hold the cold of winter" (Carrington, 1989, 31) entombing the state of fear in a distilled image of icy winter, a tonal portrait that precedes the 1947 painting of *Crookhey Hall* with its ghostly inhabitants. While Crookhey Hall actually exists, this kind of factual tangibility is only a point of departure for more complex philosophical concerns: "With the house that has been experienced by a poet, we come to a delicate point in anthro-cosmology. […] To give unreality to an image attached to a strong reality is in the spirit of poetry." (Bachelard 2014, 71-72)[iii]

The term 'anthro-cosmology' is extremely appropriate in relation to Carrington, who ventures into the transcendental through the immanent; indeed, in the example of *Green Tea*,

Carrington's equine alter ego shares space with various hermetic symbols that point far beyond the earthly realm (cauldrons, forest magic, witchcraft, an alchemical circle). The painting presents a less obviously gothic image of childhood in its depiction of the family's grand estate Hazelwood Hall, set in eighteen-and-a-half acres of grounds as seen from the perspective of the house. The tonal palette is bright, and on closer inspection, the meticulously tended and hyper-realistically rendered gardens border an underworld; there is always a "down below," where bats hang in repose, birds nest, and swaddled figures are cocooned, awaiting metamorphosis. Within this duality, the viewer experiences the simultaneity of the spatial image, whereby reality is that of the daydream, and each element or figure holds equal dynamic force. Light, dark, cold, expansive, and restricted, this is a complex and unnerving view of the gardens. A tall, white, swaddled witch figure, wrapped in the pattern of Friesian cowhide, stands in a magic circle, perhaps for protection, or the enactment of alchemical transformation. To the right of the canvas, a white, and a brown horse are tied to trees that grow out of their tails and prevent them from moving. This *explosante-fixe*[iv] emphasises a sense of claustrophobia in the repeated gesture towards movement that is impossible. The white animal stands calmly still, but the brown bares its teeth in a frenzied leap facing towards the witch figure. I read this coupling as a microcosm of Leonora's *Self Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse,* 1937-8) in which her alter ego, the white horse Tartar, appears both inside and outside the room, signalling the double bind of existing within and beyond one's childhood. The brown horse corresponds to the swollen-breasted hyena, who like the murdering creature in 'The Debutante', acts as rebellious accomplice. *Green Tea* evokes a strong sense of the sinister, in spite of its lush and verdant landscape. This complex ambivalence skilfully parallels Carrington's own relationship with the homes of her early years (including the various references to convents and churches), and her constant pursuit of magic and wonder.

Leonora's much-discussed entry into the orbit of Surrealism in 1936, involves a succession of events that resound as poetic images throughout her life: her mother's recommendation to read Herbert Read's monograph on Surrealism; her visit to the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries; and the convulsive shock at seeing Max Ernst's painting *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale* (1924) hanging there. Marina Warner tells us how Leonora recalled the vision of the painting and its visceral affect even in her later years "like a burning inside; you know how when something really touches you, it feels like burning" (Warner, 1989, 5). I find it no coincidence that this collage painting includes a small house from which two young girls appear to flee. The delirious scene itself sprang from Ernst's feverish dream/hallucination while trapped, sick, in his room. At once the homely, inviting scene is disturbed from within by the unexpected confluence of figures, objects and materials. That Carrington recalls the burning sensation of the painting's affect is telling. She experiences the surrealist *dépaysement* of the homely, a defamiliarisation of the ordinary that occurs in the shock of the marvellous. She in turn repeats this process of defamiliarisation via the imagination in the spaces that she herself reimagines. This spontaneous and affective reaction mobilises Bachelard's theory of the poetic image, and through Carrington's creative practice enacts a spectrum of polyphonic and polymorphous spaces for the viewer. To focus on the creative potential of images always described *in the present*, circumvents a purely psychoanalytic reading of haunted space in terms of the latent images of the Freudian past. I am reminded in this episode, of Georges Bataille's philosophical search for ecstasy in the everyday. After spending several days at Quarr Abbey, which he misremembers "as a house surrounded by pine, beneath a moonlit softness," he is struck by "a sudden rapture" that makes his heart thump. "Within the walls, the sky a ghostly gray, dusk, the damp uncertainty of space at that precise time; divinity had then a mad, deaf presence, illuminating up to intoxication."

(Bataille, [1954] 1988, 58) Bataille opens himself to the immensity of the building, which unfolds in an instant out of layered sensory affect. Bataille's imagination transforms him momentarily into a monk, and Bataille, like Carrington, finds answers in this metamorphosis through a spatial habitation augmented via the virtual (after Bachelard and Deleuze).

As Bachelard insists, the house is the most convincing and potent poetic device with which to experience and probe the anthro-cosmological, and such a synthesis necessarily involves the fusion of a body with its former bodies, or houses. Drawing from Rainer Maria Rilke's only novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), a work resplendent with powerfully intimate poetic images, Bachelard ponders the fusion of the individual with the 'lost house' of memory: "I never saw this strange dwelling again. Indeed, as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child's eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me […] conserved in me in fragmentary form." (Rilke quoted in Bachelard, 2014, 78) Rilke's "strange dwelling place" bears a striking similarity to the way in which Carrington's period spent incarcerated in a Santander asylum is recounted in *Down Below* (of which more later). Leonora's fragmented experience of space is absolutely defined by her sex and gender, which, unlike the examples offered by the male writers above, involves sexual objectification, sexual assault, and suppression of creativity and intellect under the rubric of 'madness'. Her rebellious impulse moves to counter suppression of the female poetic voice. Cathy Caruth insists that, "to be Traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1995, 4-5); and Carrington's oeuvre is rooted in the spaces where these events and the poetic images of her fantasies took place. Conserving space, or place, within oneself, allows for a re-living of the phenomenological experience, but also its transformation, and conversion into different energies.

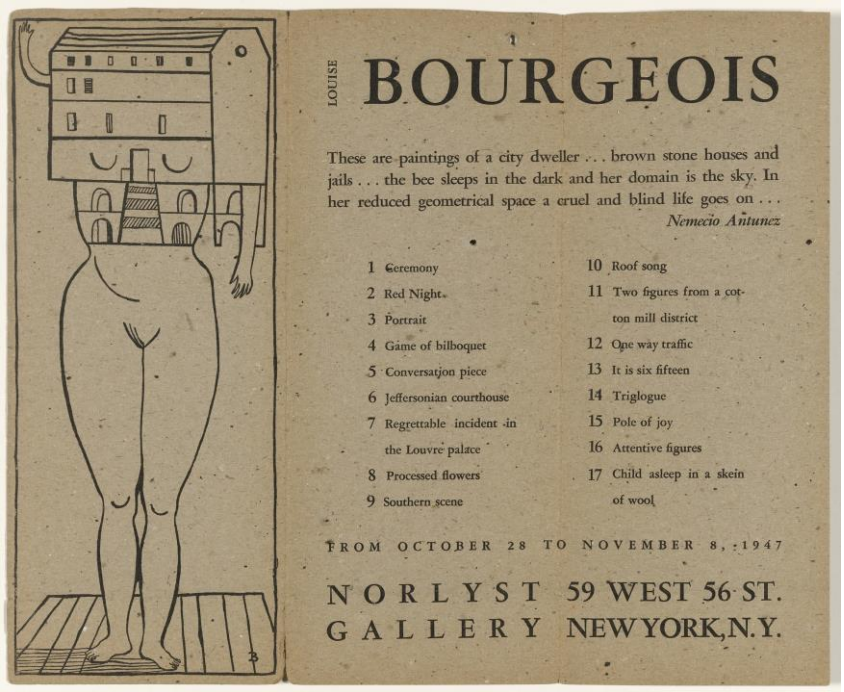

Figure 1 Poster for Louise Bourgeois's Norly St. Gallery Exhibition, New York 1947. Museum of Modern Art

Figure 2 Leonora Carrington, *The House Opposite* (detail) 1945. ARS, NY, and DACS, London 2010

Houses are bodies – Females are multi-specied

Blithely they emerge from chimneys, or, terrified, they watch from their beds as curtains fly from a nightmare window. A whole family of females proves their domesticity by having houses for heads. Louise Bourgeois, *Art News*, November 1947.[v]

Carrington's work overtly disturbs the literal and the ideological limitations imposed by borders of any kind - geographically, sexually, creatively, bodily, and spiritually. In *The Hearing Trumpet*,

she writes: "Houses are really bodies. We connect ourselves with walls, roofs, and objects just as we hang on to our livers, skeletons, flesh and bloodstream" (2005 13). To house a being is to surround it, to give it structure, to set it off with a pulse, the beat connecting flesh, blood, nerves, and stone. But for a house to be like a body means that it can sense, feel, and communicate. The figure of a *femme-maison*[vi] (to use artist Louise Bourgeois's concept) or what in Carrington's work often translates as a *room-self*, forms a syncretic sentient entity seamlessly unifying, by turn, female, human, animal, Nature, spirit, and object. Both she and Bourgeois play with conventions that conceive of female space as domestic. Often the subject of gothic tales, the merging of human form with architecture (entombing, haunting) or animal (wolf, bat, cat, or serpent) marks a site of transgression, a place where logic, reason and the ordinary are replaced by otherness, enchantment and hyperbolic emotion. These are not conventional domestic habitats, at all.

Carrington, like the women in her stories and art, does not form an identity in accordance with hegemonic or biological binaries. As she explains in the essay 'What is a woman?' "I was born a female human animal. This, I was told, meant that I was a 'Woman'" (Carrington, 2015, 72). Written in Mexico in 1971, during a period in which she engaged with second-wave feminism, (designing the poster *Mujeres Conciencia* for the Mexican women's liberation movement, for example) this essay explores the place of 'woman' in modernity, and explores the pursuit of evolution and self-knowledge against an external emotional power, which works subliminally through the magic of technology. Leonora imagines a strong emotional nucleus at her centre that is under constant attack and brainwashing in the modern world – she cites Mickey Mouse, the electric chair, and the subway as examples of such forces. Her call to arms in this piece is for women to be active; they must trust their own instincts in order to survive, and in order for civilization to survive. This is communicated forcefully in her artworks of this period, which

refuse to present the female human as static or two-dimensional in her environment. Paintings such as *Self-Portrait in Orthopedic Black Tie* (1973) and *Grandmother Moorhead's Aromatic Kitchen* (1975) transmute the artist and her maternal grandmother's domestic realm beyond mimetic correspondence. In the former, an anthropomorphised sheet hunches over a clothes stand in the pitch black, its non-face seeming to stare out at the distant mountains as a small crow and stick-like llama convene silently. In the latter the domestic space of the kitchen becomes a glowing red alchemist's cave, populated by a range of hooded figures and creatures preparing vegetables, an example of what Aberth terms her "pictorial feminism" (2004, 122). In her 'self-portrait' Leonora presents a faceless and ghostly sage-crone, eerily transporting the domestic clothes stand into the exterior landscape. Her own 'body' is enveloped in the large sheet and melds with the stand's 'feet' to assume a solid, rock-like appearance. Both paintings confound the limitations of female corporeality and female space, offering the viewer a philosophical and an alchemical version of life – a view of death and old age in the former, and transcendence or transmutation in the latter – that refuses monolithic interpretation: "If I am my body, then I am a foetus to a middle-aged woman changing every second" (2015, 72). Carrington's female characters are not split selves, but composite or multiple selves; and they are always already metamorphosing, set in motion by the complex transformations of embodied space that occur daily.

In *The Stone Door*, for example, as well as refusing to be constrained within sexual or gendered binaries, characters exceed their human shell, becoming animal, changing into goats, wolves, or a Mexican wild turkey. Human voices are decreed mineral, and bodies are comprised of planets; characters are drawn by forces from inside houses, forests, towards the stars, and from the celestial ovoid of creation, the egg. In her exploration of the novel, Anna Watz argues convincingly that it is possible to read in Carrington's irreverent and constantly shape-shifting

prose "a methdod of challenging the prevailing language of phallocracy, before the critical terminology of poststructuralist feminism was available" (2017, 101). It should be noted, that as well as creating new dwelling spaces and bodies for female characters, Carrington also undermines the solidity of patriarchal ideology by feminising her male characters. In 'Little Francis,' Francis lost rummaging in "Uncle Ubriaco's interesting collection of things," tries on a black corset with faded purple lace and gold embroidered roses: "He closed his eyes and tried to imagine a pair of ample, warm thighs in place of his own" ('Little Francis', 72). Carrington's radical move is to feminise Uncle Ubriaco's workroom, and then surprise the reader by transposing an expected trope (of the female nude) onto the male body itself, where, for an instant Francis is female. Carrington's experimentations with language, and her own understanding of the flexibility of gender boundaries and the limits of desire, also extends into the realm of a wider consciousness that is not limited to the human. Upon reaching the stone door at the frontier of Hungary: "Amagoya shook the powdery snow out of her fur and looked about for her bedroom. The walls had dissolved into mountainous countryside and the ceiling had arched into sky." ('*The Stone Door*, 32) Leonora consciously foregrounds the heightened senses of animals and plant-life in order to create an 'othered' embodied synaesthesia. For example, in 'Little Francis,' the anthropomorphic Miraldalocks is an animate plant that has grown from human hair and makes Francis reel, complaining 'What a heavy smell!' ('Little Francis', 79) The hair later becomes rolling tobacco, before changing back into human form. In another vivid sequence Francis's voice trembles with so much emotion that it materialises and grows hands so as to grab a leaf. The leaps that the reader must perform in order to keep up with these disobedient objects requires an ability to touch sound, taste colour, and smell transformations of matter.

It is perhaps in more recent theoretical explorations into the limits of the human within capitalist, patriarchal systems across the world, that Carrington's work really finds its match (it seems a cliché to say this, but she was leagues ahead of her time). She draws herself up to the boundaries of the architectural and allegorical dwellings in her work in order to assert her marginality and difference. This rebellious resilience often also involves linguistic and bodily transformations through space and time. In theorist Jane Bennett's terms, what Carrington achieves is akin to a revivification of Wonder in life, which is engineered in "cross-species encounters":

Inter- and intraspecies crossings might function as one of the sites of enchantment within a high-tech world where God's presence, while available to many, is vague to others, and absent for some. The world might or might not be a divine creation […] But this uncertainty does not mean that disenchantment is the only tale to tell. Crossings can show the world to be capable of inspiring wonder, with room for play, and for high spirits. (2001, 32)

It is Bennett's contention that so-called "crossings" between humans and other entities whether they are in science or science fiction, encourage the modern human to re-evaluate her world. If Carrington felt that anthropomorphic Mickey Mouse indexed the stupefying affect of capitalist systems, she responded with a complete bestiary in retaliation, a complete anti-orthodoxy. These creatures unite the forms, but also the inherent senses and qualities of what it means to be female, human, animal, vegetable, or mineral.

Writing in and on space

From childhood, Leonora nurtured an instinct to draw on the surfaces of her room inspired by her mother's interior decorating: "Everybody scribbled. My mother used to paint murals or what looked like murals, on boxes" (Aberth, 2004, 9). Several years later as a boarder at the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre, she channels a fantasised notion of martyrdom by attempting to levitate out

of the four walls that contained her: "I decided you see that I was going to become a saint. I probably overdid it" (De Angelis, 1991, 33). Even as a child, Leonora's rebellious will to control her own surroundings is enmeshed with artistic expression and transformation. We might consider the house at St Martin d'Ardèche, where she lived with Ernst (1938-39) as a key example of how her creative fire directly shaped her dwelling place. This short period of liberty and inspiration directly preceded the couple's respective imprisonments (Max in a French concentration camp, and Leonora in the asylum at Santander), and, until this day, is preserved as testament to their former presence in the house. From archive photographs the viewer can see painted fishtailed sirens on wardrobe doors, monsters silhouetted on walls, and giant sculptural creatures, nudes and masked figures emerging from the house's brickwork. Marina Warner recognises in this impulse to adorn or embellish Carrington's desire, which "does not strip down to the skin or beyond, but clothes, decorates, accumulates, festoons, patterns and then consumes – a bower bird's mating ritual of giving and adornment in superfluity" (Warner, 1991, 20). This outward pouring of expression is jammed soon after, in Max and Leonora's sudden departures from France – "twenty kilometres beyond Saint-Martin, the car stopped: the brakes had jammed. […] I too was jammed within, by forces foreign to my will, which were also paralysing the mechanism of the car" (*Down Below*, 7). This marvellous transposition of mental consciousness and mechanisation is characteristic of *Down* Below, where the seamless join of the animate and inanimate mirrors the permeable spatial topography of the text. The virtual spatio-temporal world falls from the narrator's lips, pushing against the hand-drawn map that appears halfway through the account. During this period, Leonora's drawing is only resumed in small scribbles, and sketches, pencilled under the watchful eyes of Dr Morales (Don Luis) and his accomplices. In

addition to the spatial mapping that occurs throughout the written text, Carrington also provided a map to *Down Below*, and a painting of the same name (1941).

Carrington's anxiety during and immediately after the Second World War manifests quite clearly in the heightened emotion, paranoia, bodily disorder, and materially schizophrenic dislocations of time and space, in *Down Below* (famously encouraged and transcribed by her friends Jeanne Megnen and Pierre Mabille, and translated for the surrealist journal *VVV* no. 4, in 1944). The prose alternately dwells and bounds rapidly through this "theater of the past" (Bachelard, 2014, 30). The narrator struggles doubly to fix her vision – firstly through the Cardiazol drug haze, and secondly as a fading series of memories. Among passages of lucidly clear description, other sequences blur in synaesthetic chaos, as space seems to alter and transform in unbelievable ways. The ability to remember is strongly tied to rooms and objects therein, which become the guiding stars steering towards her new awakening. The psychological relationship between Leonora, mental disorder, and space has been explored extensively in relation to *Down Below*, (for example, Conley 1996; Lusty, 2010); a Bachelardian reading, while interested in links between psychic disturbance and dwelling, opens up the importance of remaining outside of chronological, thus biographical, time. It allows us to consider Carrington's account in terms of its creative topoanalysis:

> At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to "suspend" its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for. (Bachelard, 2014, 30)

For it must be remembered that the re-staging of Leonora's asylum experience occurs elsewhere in her creative process, particularly during the early years in Mexico, and involves a collage of memories drawn from other spaces, onto which her recollection of the asylum is undoubtedly

layered. I find it significant that the jacket cover image chosen for the 2017 re-issue of *Down Below* (New York Review of Books) is Carrington's 1947 painting *Crookhey Hall*. This striking image of her childhood home now physically wraps around her account of mental decline and incarceration, thereby condensing a series of events into the "psychological elasticity" of an image (Bachelard, 2014, 28). In addition, it is clear that Carrington's spatial back-and-forth within her own work also relates to questions of exile, world systems, and transnational identities. In *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, Giuliana Bruno writes that: "Cities in film do not have strict walls or borders. However situated, they are a transcultural affair. Making a geographical journey of this kind, one might draft a segment of landscape and traverse it, retracing its intertextual markings on an imaginary chart" (2002, 361-362). Carrington's own spatial mapping necessarily invokes geopolitical and ideological borders as well as those driving her own fantasies.

The narrator of *Down Below* is adamant that rational terms or words are insufficient to describe the complexities of her physical state as she journeys through real and imagined towns and cities[vii]. In the Carringtonian adage, above, that "Houses are really bodies. We connect ourselves with walls, roofs, and objects just as we hang on to our livers, skeletons, flesh and blood stream," the slippage distinguishes between the body and the mind, treating the skin, skeletal frame, organs, and nervous system as distinct, but not separate from, the mind. On numerous occasions in *Down Below* the narrator aligns her body with the earth, or with the spaces and borders around her; meanwhile her mind is jammed again: "I realized that my anguish – my mind, if your prefer – was painfully trying to unite itself with my body; my mind could no longer manifest itself without producing an immediate effect on my body – on matter" (2017, 9). She tries repeatedly to articulate her experience in these body/mind terms. On arrival in Santander she is

"handed over like a cadaver to Dr. Morales" (2017, 18) and the "matter" of the body, starts to be worked through spatially, corresponding to her topoanalysis of the asylum from memory. On waking, the narrator (conflating Leonora and Max's respective fates) cannot distinguish whether she is in a concentration camp or a hospital, but is able to map her position within the four walls of her room: "In the left corner, facing my bed, stood a cheap wardrobe of varnished pine; to my right, a night table in the same style with a marble top, a small drawer, and underneath, an empty space for the chamber pot […] a glass door gave onto a corridor and onto another door panelled with opaque glass" (21-22). The expanse of the house and grounds emerges as the patient is granted access outside this room, but the mind often races ahead of the actual experience. The iron bars on the window lead the narrator to attempt to will her own freedom: "I was studying the matter closely, hanging bat-wise from the bars with my feet […] when someone jumped on me." (24) This is an example of mind over matter, where she adopts the form of one of the bats from *Green Tea's* underworld to evolve beyond the physical constraints of the room, in order to achieve what she believes to be the upper hand. Bachelard's topoanalysis privileges the daydream over the dream, and Carrington's narrator expresses hers in the forms of 'visions': 'One night **as I lay awake, I had a dream:** a bed room, huge as a theatrical stage, a vaulted ceiling painted to look like a sky […] an ancient bed provided with torn curtains and cupids, painted or real, I no longer know which' (30, emphasis mine). The narrator's inability to distinguish between fantasised and real places is a hyperbolic exaggeration of the formation of the poetic image from previously inhabited space, as outlined by Bachelard. The Cardiazol shots exacerbate the already traumatic defamiliarisation that she feels having fled a number of previous homes.

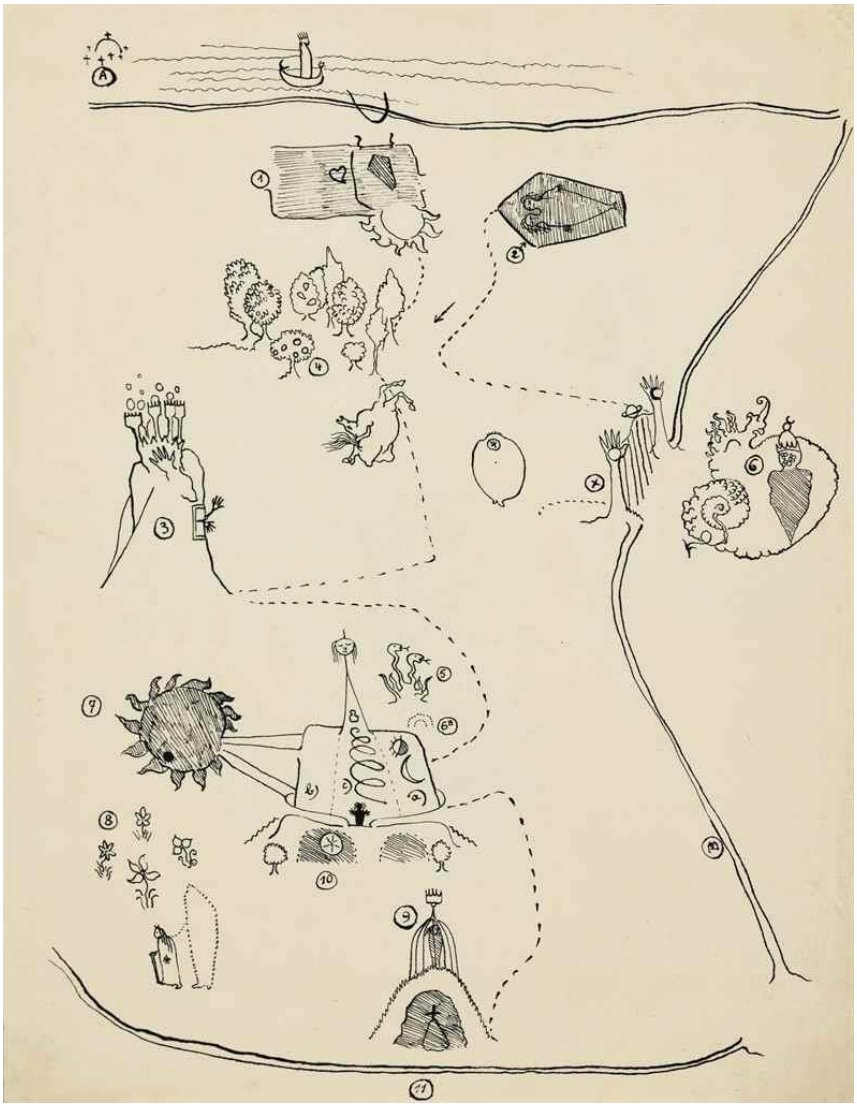

Figure 3 Leonora Carrington, 'Map of Down Below ' c. 1940-41

In the text, "Down Below" or "*Abajo*" is imagined by the narrator to be a paradise within the space of her captivity, with "unbarred windows" (35); a place like a hotel, where telephones communicate, and people are allowed to read and walk freely in their blossoming state of recovery. This un-glimpsed and out-of-reach space is her fantasy of people who, after successful treatment, can live happily in a Jungian collective unconscious. Before her capture, hotels in Spain and Portugal feature negatively as sites of entrapment. Carrington offers conflicting images that eschew convention or hierarchy in her spatial analogies. Where Jung envisions a *cellar* of the unconscious, Bachelard, in thinking about the role of insects "housed" in literature, searches through a *crypt* of memories, burrowing into the corners of rooms. For Carrington's narrator, rooms are ambivalently situated throughout her journey, at times mirroring her own state of

being, at others seeming to extend from her own body. Carrington's hand-drawn map of the sanatorium is presented from an aerial perspective, and includes "Down Below", as well as "Africa", the "Kitchen Garden", "A desert scene", "'Outside World' Street" and various other lairs, caves and structures. As Ella Mudie has noted, this map combines Carrington's deeply personal symbolism with a topographical realism, unlocking the key to her own recovery:

> On the one hand, the schizoid cartographies of Down Below perform a prototypically surrealist deterritorializtation of mapping with its fantastical transfigurations of literal geographies into ambiguous psychic spaces […Yet] Carrington's central dilemma in Down Below ultimately runs counter to the disorientating impulses of surrealist cartographies in so far as Carrington must learn to appropriate mapping strategies for her own ends in order to navigate her way back to psychic self-mastery (Mudie, 2014, 147).[viii]

At several points in the memoir, the narrator feels compelled to communicate or to make sense of her predicament by means of pen and paper. In one instance she sends a drawing of a triangle to Don Luis – "That triangle, to my way of thinking, explained everything." In another she makes calculations to realise herself within the holy trinity; and in another Don Luis asks her to sketch a map of her journey from Saint Martin D'Ardèche, which she is unable to do. It would seem that an 'enforced' journey into the traumatic past, is less successful than a creative re-imagining that incorporates a re-ordering of not only immediate spatial surroundings, but also a cosmographical re-centring that turns convention on its head. To experience Carrington's time in Santander, as a reader, as a viewer, is to sense the filth, fear, shock, and wonder of an artist exploring the boundaries of dislocated and expanded space. To experience this, however, does not preclude the impact created by the political particularities: war, exile, colonial and patriarchal structures, or mental health and female bodies.

We might pause here to consider how Carrington's psycho-spatial work resists the gothic tropes of the Victorian madwoman, by unlocking any fixed idea of confinement. In the summer of 1892 Charlotte Perkins Gillman wrote her autobiographical short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, while

under house arrest. In the account, the narrator, forbidden to write by her physician-husband John, suffers from a "nervous disposition" and "a slight hysterical tendency" ('The Yellow Wallpaper", np.). The room to which she is banished was formerly a nursery (a Carrington staple), the windows are barred, the floorboards gouged and splintered, and is set within the large house and gardens of a "colonial mansion" or 'haunted house' (np.). As time passes, she becomes obsessed with the revolting yellow wallpaper that seems to suffocate her: "It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study […] I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before" (np.). What transpires in this story of mental illness, is a fusion of the senses as Perkins Gilman's narrator finds it increasingly difficult to separate the "optic horror" of the wall-papered room from her own perception of being. In the surreal denouement she imagines herself becoming one with the wallpaper and its creeping phantasms. Similarly in *Down Below*, the narrator describes how "[t]he room was painted with silvery pine trees on a red background; a prey to the most complete panic, I saw pine trees in the snow." Occurring after a third dose of Cardiazol, and following a series of convulsions, complete panic is fused with the experience of the walls coming alive. In both texts, the writer is unable to tear herself from the optic horror and becomes one with it. While in real life both writers were feminists, each striving to exert control from a marginal, often liminal, position, the vast scale of Carrington's oeuvre, and her skill in so many mediums, has, I would argue, a special and widely affecting radicality. This radicality is all the more powerful when it confounds human as well as spatial boundaries in allowing the female (and male) characters to become animal, or other, and this is fully explored in the painting *Down Below* (1942), most likely a night vision of the asylum seen from the grounds.

Leonora is present in the painting as both her alter ego – in this version a ghostly iteration of the white horse – and a winged figure, dressed in Spanish costume, her expression signalling a disconnected or melancholic state. Towards the background a winged white horse sits atop the gates of the sanatorium, and mountains flank the main building. As is customary in Carrington's paintings, formal limits signalled by gates, walls, closed windows or ropes, trap the white horse whilst simultaneously indexing the possibility of freedom. The four figures to the left are all human-animals; two have the heads of a bird and a ram. A bearded 'man' looks at the viewer, 'his' torso bearing either a platter of three fish, or a line of three elongated teats. There is an orgiastic or carnival atmosphere that combines thematic preoccupations from the text. Seemingly broken free, however, the painting retains the ominous gloaming of the place itself.

Sharks are houses – the marking of territory

Figure 4 Leonora Carrington, *Tiburón*, Gouache, ink and pencil. c. 1942 Private Collection

Of course the imagined surrealist house is about the mind, so that the expansion of the setting takes place in the viewer's head – like the symbolist theatre of Stéphane Mallarmé, a mental scene for the poetry of place. […] The ideal surrealist space is flexible, fluid" (Caws, 2010, 48).

Whether Leonora continued to be a surrealist, or not, the sense of a "poetry of place" expanded by the fluidity of the mind and its cross-species encounters, is paramount to her oeuvre. The poetry is an experiential unfolding in space that flashes anew with and for each reader or viewer. Carrington's worlds come to be occupied and shared, errant in space and time, but profoundly felt in a convulsive instant. In my head, for example, the knowledge that Carrington loved Jean Cocteau's novella *Les enfants terribles* (Aberth, 2004, 15), in which a rock disguised as a snowball wounds one of the central characters, shares poetic space with "the snowballs in which a heart beat" that decorate the skeleton's lodgings in *The Skeleton's Holiday* (Carrington, 2017, 38). Similarly, filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky's account of Leonora's visceral rebuke of Luis Buñuel's advances by way of "decorating" his room with her menstrual blood, is conflated in my mind with her propensity for sketching, as well as the much later menstrual art of North American artists Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneemann: "She found it tasteless: it looked exactly like a motel room. Taking advantage of the fact that she was in her menstrual period, she covered her hands with blood and used them to make bloody handprints all over the wall," (Jodorowsky, 2008, 27). By plastering Buñuel's room with blood (if the anecdote is to be believed) she retaliates for her traumatic rape in a room "decorated in the Chinese Style" in a house with Spanish wrought-iron balconies in Madrid (*Down Below*, 13). I would argue that her creative process, in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, defiantly sets about crafting a meaningful and tactile practice that mirrors her ambidextrous painting process "communicating the interdependence of all aspects of the phenomenal and psychic worlds" (Chadwick, 1991, 11). In so doing, she illustrates how "There are no simple phenomena; every phenomenon is a fabric of relations" (Bachelard, 1984, 147).

For me, Carrington's spatio-poetic understanding of the world is summarised in her drawing *Tiburón*, (c.1942) which presents a humorous, but rather horrific, spectacle of spatial travel in gouache, ink and pencil. The titular shark occupies centre frame; it has become a vehicle co-opted for long-distance travel by what looks to be a group of aristocrats. The barbed hook that pierces its jaw evidences its enslavement. A large window is cut into the shark's belly, out of which the intrepid explorers peer. Beneath the main body of the fish, a basement room is outlined, housing hanging corpses (suggesting both tarot and the deep South). Elsewhere geckos, horses, a bed, wheel saws, leaves and an inverted statue float against the light-grey clouds. At once a vision of Jules Verne and violence, the drawing is inscribed with a message to Remedios Varo, that among other things, tells of a spell that is being made for her."[ix] While the message recalls the warm epistolary bond between Marion and Carmella in *The Hearing Trumpet,* the drawing is sinister and foreboding. The marine tableau presents a momentary snapshot of the violence done against humans and animals, capturing the spirit of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and perhaps launching a critique against the idle animals of capitalism.

In 2003, art historian Marsha Meskimmon wrote that "the intellectual challenge presented by women's art practice is to mobilise radical difference and think otherwise; every intervention into this subject is strategic, exhilarating and dangerous, changing both what we know and how we know" (2). Leonora Carrington's work has always led me to "think otherwise" due to her absolute refusal to cover her humanness, or her provocative female-human-animal self. In *White Cube* London's 2017 exhibition *Dreamers* Awake, visitors were encouraged to contemplate the feminist links between female surrealists and the women artists that followed them. Painting, sculpture, photography and film combined in a vibrant and irreverent take-over of the space. Carrington was represented by her iconic *Self Portrait* (1937-38) and a small sketch of female cat

faces. As Alyce Mahon writes in the exhibition catalogue: "Many contemporary women artists frequently display or acknowledge a debt to Surrealists, and especially to Surrealist women. Like thie predecessors, they consistently ask us to look at the world through new eyes: our attention is drawn to the marvellous in the everyday […] and to the vital need to map identity in all it multiplicity" (2017, 13). As Catriona McAra has shown in her trailblazing work on Carrington's legacy in contemporary art, the potential resonances are boundless. Might Leonora not be the most complete and complex exemplar for a radical spatio-poetic and female reterritorialization of the world? In the words of Marion Leatherby, "If the old woman can't go to Lapland, then Lapland must come to the Old Woman" (*The Hearing Trumpet*, 158).

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[i] Carrington's first novel was written in Mexico City in the 1940s, and was first published in French as La porte de pierre (1976). The complete, original English manuscript was published by St Martin's Press, New York, in 1977

[ii] Written throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, the majority of Carrington's short stories were published much later in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The dates given here are those cited in the *Dorothy Project* collection of 2017.

[iii] In a chapter 'House and Universe" in *The Poetics of* Space, Bachelard cites a number of writers' literary houses – for example those of Georges Spyridaki and René Cazelles – as forces for awakening feelings and for understanding the universe. Houses, he insists, form a dialectical process, they are catalysts in the philosophical negotiations required to express what it is to be.

[iv] This term refers to Man Ray, photograph 'Explosante-fixe', 1934, which was published in 'Minotaure' No.5, 1934, and reproduced in André Breton's *L'Amour fou*, (first edition Paris: Gallimard, 1937. It refers to the cessation of movement when a still photograph captures a dynamic image. Here, a dancer is caught mid-twirl, her fanned skirts frozen, yet filled with potential movement.

[v] Cited in Nixon, 2005, 53.

[vi] On April 4th, 2017, Silver Press held an event at the London Review Bookshop, London, to mark the publication of *The Debutante and Other Stories*, with readings and a Q&A with writers Marina Warner and Chloe Aridjis, which I attended. An audience member asked Warner, whether she thought there was a connection between Bourgeois's and Carrington's houses; to which she responded, that on reflection there was.

[vii] In her expansive doctoral thesis, Julia Salmerón Cabañas includes an interview with Dr. Morales, in which he suggests that much of Carrington's memoir is strikingly accurate (Salmerón Cabañas, 1997).

[viii] In addition to Mudie, Chadwick, and Warner, several scholarly analyses of *Down Below* draw on Carrington's work in relation to the surrealist movement. For example: Katharine Conley (1996) investigates the potential of liminality as a means of escaping the role of female muse, while Arberth sees the text as "signalling Carrington's triumphal return to Surrealism, this time on her own terms" (2004, 51).

[ix] The original inscription is in French. It is translated by Whitney Chadwick in 'El Mundo Mágico: Leonora Carrington's Enchanted Garden,' 1991, 12; believed to have been drawn very closely following Leonora's incarceration, it is not clear exactly when the inscription was added.