

Presenting Georges Perec's work as a contemplation of domestic space, nested into the wider structures of the city, and supported by the countless, structuring microevents of the 'infraordinary'.

From the infraordinary to the extraordinary: Georges Perec and domesticity

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The design and organisation of domestic environments is fraught with decision-making, a process often dictated by fashion. The resulting inhabitation of domestic spaces blends together the routine and the banal, with occasional forays into the extraordinary. The spaces of domesticity range from single rooms to elaborate and complex spatial arrangements in which spaces are adjoined to or nested in other spaces. The spaces of domesticity can be functionally prescribed or open-ended, they support furniture, behaviours, and narratives. The writer Georges Perec (1936–82) provides a way of looking at the domestic realm and ordinary life through his many inter-related writings on the subject.

After developing an early reputation as a writer, Perec joined the experimental literary group known as Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) in 1967. Formed in 1960, the group brought together writers, mathematicians, and pataphysicians, inspired by the leadership of Raymond Queneau, and by older writers such as Lewis Carroll, Alfred Jarry, and Raymond Roussel. The well-known Italian writer Italo Calvino joined Oulipo in 1973. The group was devoted to rule-based and constrained writing techniques; they also exploited older forms of structured writing particularly in poetry. Often using mathematical methods, the Oulipo writers looked for textual potential and combinatorial results. Their works are sometimes attacked as formalistic and mechanistic. Queneau states that the objectives of the group were: 'To propose new "structures" to writers, mathematical in nature, or to invent new artificial or mechanical procedures that will contribute to literary activity'.¹

Perec was one of the leading proponents of Oulipo methods, which is particularly evident in two novels, *A Void* (*La Disparition*) the book that famously does not employ the letter E (example of a lipogram, or the omission of a letter in a text) and his major work, *Life A User's Manual* (a clinamen, or a swerve away from convention). Beyond the formal methods that Perec employs, were the many approaches to capturing the ordinary, or the everyday, inspired by writers and theorists such as Roland Barthes. Perec asks:

*How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?*²

This question figures large in his writings and was approached by Perec in various ways. In the early 1970s the urbanist and philosopher Paul Virilio coined the term *infra-ordinaire* to capture an aspect of the concept, the notion was seized upon by Perec, his friend and colleague. The 'infraordinary' can be defined as follows:

*[It] is first and foremost the opposite of extraordinary, of that which immediately leaps to our attention. It does not entirely correspond to the ordinary, but rather, as the prefix suggests, to what lies hidden beneath the surface of ordinariness.*³

In his quest for an 'anthropology of everyday life', Perec produced texts such as *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* that involved the recording of detailed observations of the ordinary and infraordinary in a public space, a task he found difficult to achieve. As Tom Emerson observes, Perec employed 'a meticulous attention to the physical world, [necessary to] preserve it from erasure and disappearance'.⁴ It is as though Perec was capturing places and ways of living before they were eliminated from the world. This preoccupation with memory and place is evident in Perec's many writings about himself in Paris in various settings, both public and private; another particular case is the short text he produced on the Rue Vilin, the street he grew up on that was wiped out in the early 1970s.⁵

This focus on documenting was also evident in Perec's first significant text *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, which examines the 'art of living'.⁶ In this book a young couple employed in market research struggle to live in both Paris and Sfax, Tunisia. Their lives are consumed by living frugally and trying to make the right fashion choices based on reading certain popular publications and negotiating the influences of their peers. The book ostensibly explores the world of objects, as *Species of Spaces* would later examine types of space. But, as Jean Baudrillard points out the objects described by Perec portray the void in the relationship of the couple, that their relationship is based on pure consumption.⁷

Over time Perec's approach changed towards recording the 'real' and the ordinary, moving as Derek Schilling argues from a 'literary mastery of the real' to assigning 'an autonomous value to everydayness'.⁸ Here we will primarily examine two texts by Perec, *Species of Spaces* and *Life A User's Manual*, to examine how he framed and questioned notions of domesticity; asking, can this reading be construed as a theory of domesticity?

The page, the bed, and the bedroom

Perec's text *Species of Spaces* (*Espèces d'espaces*, first published in 1974) was published in English translation by John Sturrock in 1997, and has garnered a readership among architects, and among many other disciplines.⁹ In the text Perec describes a spatial continuity between city and dwelling that is characterised by spatial types, thresholds/boundaries, objects, and everyday practices often of an autobiographical nature. In sequence he writes about the page, the bed, the bedroom, the apartment, the apartment building, the street, the neighbourhood, the town, the country, countries, continents, and the world as a series of embedded spatial conditions. It is an outward zoom, moving from the small and particular to the large and general, each nested inside the next; it is also a scalar operation.¹⁰ The organisation of the text suggests a kind of Russian doll nesting of spaces within larger spatial systems; he also implies that the private room in a house or an apartment cannot be fully isolated from its spatial contexts.¹¹

If we closely read *Species of Spaces*, we can uncover a kind of sociological work, a critique or manifesto, and an evolution from Perec's previous writings. Perec begins by stating that he is interested in the familiar spaces we live in, not infinite 'intergalactic' space.¹² While acknowledging that we operate in a spatial continuum, he tends to situate the reader in the domestic. He observes that:

[...] spaces have multiplied, been broken up and have diversified. There are spaces today of every kind and every size, for every use and every function. To live is to pass from one space to another [...].¹³

These spaces are adjacent to one another and often nested in one another. If nested, then one is always linked to the smallest and largest elements in one's spatial continuum. The page, typically as a white rectangular sheet of paper, defines a kind of space and a potential. He writes: 'I write: I inhabit my sheet of paper, I invest it, I travel across it'.¹⁴ He suggests that space for a writer begins with words on a blank page, the writer invents and inventories space.¹⁵ Extending this idea, it can be said that we create words for all kinds of spatial and geographical conditions, we observe and imagine space, and we populate space with people and events. Everywhere, people are engaged in activities, big and small.

The third section of *Species of Spaces* is titled 'The Bed'. In Western society the bed figures large as a possession and as a rectangular space for sleep. The bed is a fundamental space, the one place that can always be controlled. It is often the place of birth

(and conception), the space for lovemaking, a place where one recovers from an illness, and the space of dying. The bed is associated with many other aspects of living including reading, eating, writing, receiving friends and family, watching television, and meditation. The bed is scaled to the horizontal human body, from our beds we can gaze upwards, and it is the space for dreaming. In Perec's world the bed is the most fundamental domestic space, the object that domestic space emanates from.

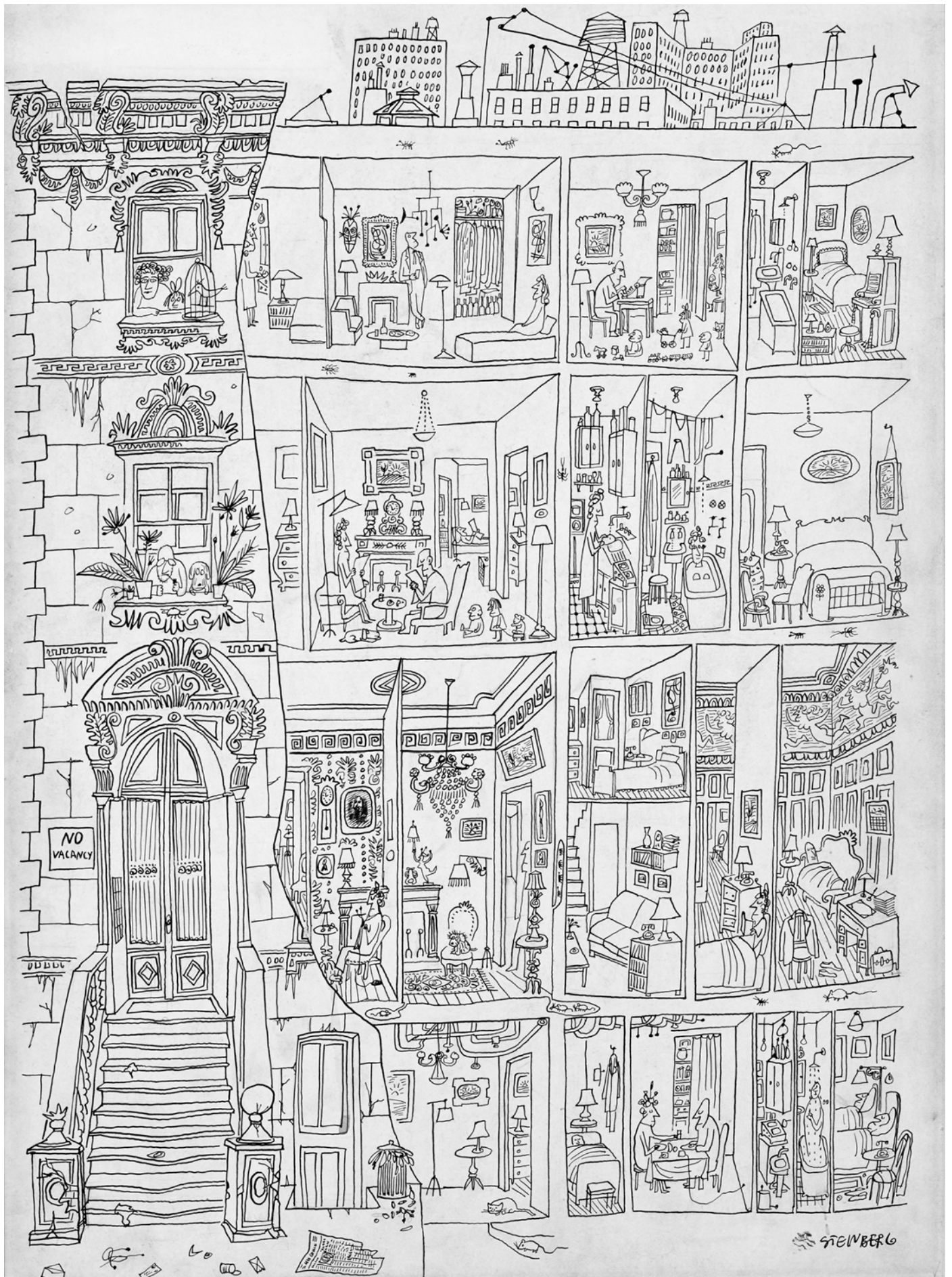
In the subsequent section on 'The Bedroom', Perec references the important beds and bedrooms in his life, and elsewhere he unsuccessfully tries to remember and classify all the spaces he has slept in.¹⁶ The fundamental importance of the bed, and its designated room, is captured when he writes: 'The coenesthetic certainty of my body in the bed, and the topographical certainty of the bed in the room, these alone reactivate my memory'.¹⁷ The bed resonates large in the concept of a 'home body', a person who likes to stay home, rather than exploring the world-at-large. Perec is particularly preoccupied with the bed and the bedroom, to the detriment of other domestic spaces. And while he describes a variety of domestic spaces in his later book *Life A User's Manual*, the bedroom is the centre of his world. What does this mean for the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, the garden/balcony, the garage, and the bathroom?

Perec asks the most fundamental questions: 'What does it mean, to live in a room? Is it to live in a place to take possession of it? What does taking possession of a place mean?'¹⁸ He answers by saying that we are the authors of our own geography.¹⁹ At various scales this is our domestic quest. This is captured in the accumulation of memories we have of the world that we compose, the spatial fragments we experience, and the events that brought them alive. By examining the infraordinary and recording these in detail Perec is stating that this seemingly banal and repetitive aspect of life is important. *Species of Spaces* points forward to *Life A User's Manual*, considered to be one of the most important novels of the twentieth century. Perec's biographer and translator, David Bellos, notes that,

*Perec's approach to space is minimalist, modest, and personal. He offers no generalisations, only observations of the kind anyone might make [...] and thereby invents a uniquely democratic literary style. By the same token Espèces d'espaces is an autobiographical work.*²⁰

The apartment and the apartment building

The apartment is the most typical type of dwelling in Paris (and much of the world), and it is to this that Perec turns his attention in the sections of *Species of Spaces* entitled 'The Apartment' and 'The Apartment Building'. He observes that apartments are normally made up of number of rooms, each defined by function (size, organisation, and arrangement of furniture/fixtures), for example, a bedroom is signalled by the fact it typically has a bed in it.²¹ Perec implies that there is something 'unequivocal' about this, and suggests that modern functionalism is



1 Saul Steinberg, *Doubling Up*, 1946, ink and pencil on paper, 19 3/4 x 14 in., private collection. Originally published in *Architectural Forum*, February 1946, republished in Steinberg, *The Art of Living*, 1949.

rigid, prescribed, and arbitrary.²² This leads him to the simple formula:

1. *Every apartment consists of a variable, but finite, number of rooms.*
2. *Each room has a particular function.*²³

But as he points out 'a room is fairly malleable space'.²⁴ A room is a simple configuration of space, often only separated from other spaces by thin walls. Perec demonstrates that the function of a space is carefully prescribed by activities defined according to the time of day.

As Perec thinks about the functions of specific spaces he raises the concept of open modern space, as opposed to the delimited rooms of tradition. He also proposes a model based on 'functional relationships in between the rooms'.²⁵ He then abandons the functional and temporal arrangement of domestic space and suggests that an apartment could be laid out according to the senses.²⁶ Perec also proposes an apartment organised according to the days of the week (heptadian rhythms), with seven rooms each devoted to a day. Continuing this he suggests rooms organised according to themes, such as an 'airplane' room or a 'trapper's cabin' room.²⁷ The notion that a domestic space could be organised in non-functional ways is very intriguing. In order to further challenge the conventions of everyday living Perec tries to image 'a space without a use'. In his short essay on this he concludes that it is impossible to have a useless space.²⁸ Perec ends the section on the apartment by briefly describing the importance of doors, staircases, and walls. He notes the vital role of doors in mediating space and argues that staircases have lost their importance, and suggests walls define spaces. In the section on 'The Apartment Building' he describes his plan for *Life A User's Manual* and provides a detailed account of Saul Steinberg's drawing from *The Art of Living* (1949) entitled 'Doubling Up' (originally published in *Architectural Forum* in 1946), which was a source of inspiration for the book. In this section Perec inventories all the people, animals, objects, finishes, and spaces in the Steinberg drawing.

Perec notes, in his short text 'Statement of Intent', that he uses four basic modes in his writings: (1) sociological; (2) autobiographical; (3) ludic; and (4) novelistic.²⁹ In *Life A User's Manual* (originally published in 1978 as *La vie mode d'emploi*) he uses primarily sociological, ludic, and novelistic methods. He demonstrates that he has mastered all aspects of writing. As Bellos states:

*Perec shows he can tell fairy stories, that he can construct a novel in letters, an adventure narrative, a business saga, a dream sequence, a detective story, a family drama, a sporting history; he demonstrates he has mastered comic techniques, the creation of pathos, historical reconstruction, and many non-narrative forms of writing.*³⁰

In this book Perec examines the lives of residents in a typical Parisian apartment building, it remains one of the most significant imaginings of how a building, or work of architecture, can be occupied. The novel, and the elaborate structure it employs, brings together all the spaces described in *Species of Spaces*. Through the vast scope of Perec's project and the

many literary methods he uses, the book captures the intertwining lives of the occupants of the building at 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier, in Paris's 17th arrondissement, at precisely 8.00 pm on 23 June 1975. Paul A. Harris points out the novel is constructed in a highly objective manner using a complex combination of techniques.³¹ Perec's concentration on the minute details of everyday life is evident in his descriptions of each room, the ludic techniques of Oulipo pervade the construction of the book, and the book is packed full of stories.

In *Life A User's Manual*, Perec employs a 10 x 10 bi-Latin square based on the organisation of a chessboard, matched against the cutting away of the façade of a typical Parisian apartment building revealing a shallow sectional space as per Steinberg's drawing [1]. The 10 x 10 grid and the 'knight's tour' from chess is used to determine the sequence of chapters in the text. Each square in the grid contains two elements that relate to two lists of factors. Perec's lists 'include body position, jewellery, colour, geometrical shape, the type of floor, ceiling, and furniture, and artistic style of the room, a place on the globe and period history, authors and texts to be cited'.³²

Perec devised forty-two 'preprogrammed' factors in order to structure each chapter. These factors are Position, Activity, Quotation 1, Quotation 2, Number, Role, Third Sector, Motive?, Walls, Floors, Period, Place, Style, Furniture, Length, Miscellaneous, Age/Sex, Animals, Clothes, Fabrics (Nature), Fabrics (Substance), Colours, Accessories, Jewels, Reading, Music, Pictures, Books, Drink, Food, Small Furniture, Toys, Feelings, Paint, Surfaces, Volumes, Flowers, Trinkets, *Manque*, *Faux*, Couple 1, and Couple 2.³³ Effectively, every aspect of the setting is recognised, akin to a list of design criteria as used by an architect or interior designer. The forty-two factors used by Perec to structure each of the ninety-nine chapters ensures that he covers plot, actors, and setting in a systematic way. It is evident that while the setting is a very detailed aspect of the text, the building ultimately provides an armature for the inhabitants, their possessions, and their stories. In *Life A User's Manual*, Perec catalogues domestic space in terms of dimensions, function/type, location, and objects contained.

At the heart of Perec's complex book are his obsessions with puzzles, lists, games, word play, detective stories, dictionaries, cataloguing, reading, observing the everyday, cooking, and encyclopedias; each of these is woven into the text. The numerous short narratives (many of which are listed in Chapter Fifty-One (*Valène, Servants' Quarters*, 9) provide an extraordinary dimension to the structure by describing the histories of the occupants or an amusing tale. He also includes references to many other writers, and to his own career; the intricate techniques and voluminous knowledge on display throughout the book is remarkable.³⁴

As Stefanie Elisabeth Sobelle notes, Perec 'abandons psychology', instead concentrating on 'dimensionality'.³⁵ In the opening chapter of *Life A User's Manual* he writes:

The inhabitants of a single building live a few inches from each other, they are separated by a mere partition

wall, they share the same spaces repeated along each corridor, they perform the same movements at the same times [...]. They entrench themselves in their domestic dwelling space.³⁶

But this entrenchment only matters because of the accumulated memories and stories that are embedded in the building.

The first chapter is about the main staircase which figures large in the text, the shared staircase being so vital to the vertical life of the building. In effect the staircase is an extension of the street, organising and connecting the various apartments. Perec writes: 'For all that passes, passes by the stairs, and all that comes, comes by the stairs [...]'.³⁷ He notes that the stairs in apartment buildings are often an inhospitable place. In effect the chapters on the staircase glue the book together. At the precise moment of the text, there are various other people on the stairs including the teenager Gilbert Berger, the German industrialist Hermann Fugger exiting an apartment, a salesman, a Jehovah's Witness, a patient waiting to enter a doctor's office, a piano tuner's grandson reading a book, and Olivia Rorschach's nephew.

The opening chapter captures an assistant to a realtor climbing the stairs clutching three drawings: a map showing the location of the building in the district; a cross-section of the building listing the tenants; and a plan of Gaspard Winkler's apartment (a key character and the puzzle maker). She has come to inspect Winkler's rooms in order to sell them. Winkler has died, and the traces of his life remain in his rooms.

In Chapter Two we are introduced to Madame de Beaumont's drawing room, and to the story of her husband Fernand de Beaumont, an archaeologist who committed suicide in 1935 after writing a report on his recent excavations. So begins the tour of the building, which visits apartments as determined by the rules of the game. Inhabitants of the building are caught in a variety of acts, from the banal to the sexual. Most chapters contain short histories or stories associated with the occupants and their acquaintances. As many commentators have noted, what seems to start out as an elaborate mathematical exercise turns into a surprisingly human examination of the lives of mainly ordinary people in an ordinary building.³⁸

One of the central stories in the novel involves the tenant named Bartlebooth who concocts an elaborate life-long plan to create watercolour paintings of harbours around the world; Bartlebooth is taught to paint by Serge Valène, another tenant of the building. The five hundred paintings Bartlebooth produces are shipped back to Paris to be cut into puzzles by the craftsman Winkler. These unique puzzles are then reassembled by Bartlebooth and then the image is erased. Ultimately the project, a reflection on the structure of the book, is never completed.

In Chapter Seventeen (*On the Stairs*, 2) Perec writes: *The stairs, for him, were, on each floor, a memory, an emotion, something ancient and impalpable, something palpating somewhere in the guttering flame of his memory: a gesture, a noise, a flicker, a young woman*

*singing operatic arias to her own piano accompaniment.*³⁹

This quote affirms Perec's preoccupation with the elusiveness of memories, small events, and that which disrupts a carefully constructed order. In Chapter Forty-Nine (*On the Stairs*, 7) Perec describes the evolving class organisation of the apartment building, particularly around the two floors of former servants' quarters on the top floors. Parisian apartment buildings are typically organised vertically with a commercial ground floor, apartments devoted to the wealthy, and a progressive diminishing in status as one moves upwards. The top floors were historically occupied by servants, students, and artists.⁴⁰

During the twentieth century, as Perec captures, this changed as societal attitudes to class transformed; among the evolving group of tenants there is a social and political order based on class, gender, occupation, age, length of time in the building, etc. Describing an incident between tenants, Perec observes:

*It is one of those breaches around which the life of the building is structured, a source of tiny tensions, micro-conflicts, allusions, implications, skirmishes.*⁴¹

This phrase sums up the tenor of Perec's text, with its emphases on the small, the micro, the infinitesimal, and the fleeting, counter-balanced by stories that are short, but often bizarre. In Chapter Eighty-Nine (*Moreau*, 5) Perec states:

*A closer reading of these imaginary lives would no doubt lead to discovering the key and seeing how some of the events that have influenced the history of the building, some of the legends and semi-legends that go round about one or another of its inhabitants, some of the threads that connect them to each other, have been buried in the narrative and have given it its skeleton.*⁴²

The building represents in a microcosm the city of Paris, an affirmation of Perec's preoccupation with the accumulating history of an imagined building. In Chapter Ninety-Five (*Rorschach*, 6) he even provides a history of the building's site and construction. In Chapter Ninety-Nine (*Bartlebooth*, 5) is a summary of all the actions the various tenants are performing at the exact moment of the text. In the Epilogue Perec reveals that Valène, who dies some weeks after 23 June 1975, was working on an unfinished painting of a cross-section of an apartment building.

The many stories in the book are often interconnected but provide no over-arching narrative as one finds in a traditional novel. Referencing the many stories in the text, Gabriel Josipovici argues:

*Their meaning emerges not from anything within them which is eventually revealed, but from the relation to all the other stories. There is no revelation but only pattern, and lives do not make any 'final sense' but are simply seen to take on certain shapes.*⁴³

In an imitation of life, the stories are the seemingly arbitrary narratives of lives lived. As the characters inhabit the same building there are bound to be some connections between the stories. And yet out of the numerous recordings of the infraordinary, Perec overlays this with many extraordinary stories of human fragility, vision, and folly. There is also a

comedic aspect to the stories, a deployment of techniques, and endless reference to sources beyond the text, some of which Perec reveals. It is a balancing act between the infraordinary and banal actions of everyday day life, and the extraordinary stories that background the many residents of the building.⁴⁴

Observing domesticity

Life A User's Manual is a study of a domestic world, how we organise our residences into compartments of space, how we furnish the rooms, how our stories create our realities, and how the lives of people in an ordinary apartment building intertwine in so many ways. Although frozen in a moment, the novel captures the vagaries and complexities of the everyday. It describes the routines of living, unexpected happenings, the connections between people living together at close quarters, the role of objects and décor in defining a period in time and space, the histories that can support and damage a life, the common aspirations and tragedies of urban dwellers, and so on. Italo Calvino alludes to these constructs when he writes:

*In order to escape the arbitrary nature of existence, Perec, like his protagonist, is forced to impose rigorous rules and regulations on himself, even if the rules are in turn arbitrary. But the miracle is that this system of poetics, which might seem artificial and mechanical, produces inexhaustible freedom and wealth of invention.*⁴⁵

The objects we collect and the environments we create reflect cultural production as selected by individuals, and often determined by fashion. In the contemporary world there is little ability to create our own living conditions, rather we select from images in magazines, television programmes, displays, catalogues, and other media, as Perec observes. Our domestic environments are a compendium of choices we have made, the things we have acquired, the memories of past events, and the daily routines we pursue. Into this are the significant moments that happen when someone dies, or a holiday is taken, or a cataclysmic event occurs; Perec astutely writes:

*[...] of the slow installation of furniture and objects, of the slow adaptation of the body to space, that whole sum of minute, untellable events [...] all those infinitesimal gestures in which the life of a flat [apartment] is most faithfully encapsulated, and which will be upset from time to time by the sudden – unforeseen or ineluctable, tragic or benign, ephemeral or definitive – fractures of an ahistorical daily grind.*⁴⁶

This further description of the infraordinary is what makes up the fabric of a life, the extraordinary is either a strange accumulation of small events, or some large event from an outside source. Part of this reflects the fact that the use and definition of domestic space changes over time, and between cultures. The patterns of behaviour used by the original residents of a nineteenth-century apartment building are not the same as those living in the building in the 1970s. Perec describes apartments that have been modified, renovated, and even knocked together. The social and class hierarchies in the building also change as the economic and

cultural realities change; where once the working class lived, now live the middle class.

The house/city relationship invokes the public versus private debate, which Perec alludes to. Residences comprise the largest aspect of a city's architecture, and so the domestic realm is in many ways the constituent element in the city, just as the city is like a big house. In *Life A User's Manual*, Perec constructs the lives of the inhabitants as the mid-point in a continuum between furniture, space, the world, and the passage of time. He clearly defines private space as separate from the public space of the city, as Richard Sennett has demonstrated in his *The Fall of Public Man*, it is dangerous to confuse the two realms. Sennett also shows that we have increasingly expected the public realm to provide 'intimate' experiences (or domesticating public space), something historically only the homeless, the criminal, or the debauched would have undertaken.⁴⁷

Perec's writings are deeply autobiographical, a search for himself; it is a wide-ranging investigation of his world using himself as the subject. It seems like a quest for home, a continuous striving for a place in the world, a study of all aspects of living from the most banal to the extraordinary. He charts everything. There is always a sense that he is making forays into the world from the familiar environment of his home, prodding the limits of his world. Ultimately his work is an extended meditation on the city of Paris, a kind of love affair with a remarkable environment. His decision to write his major work on an ordinary apartment building in Paris is a testimony to this, and it is also a brilliant demonstration of his many writing techniques.

Perec writes that your room 'is the centre of the world'.⁴⁸ This should be a stable place, protected by the spaces surrounding and adjoining it. His own difficult life, as a child of the Holocaust, haunted him, as did the changing environments of Paris. His love of many kinds of stories, and how these define lives is also crucial to his work. The things we accumulate as part of our lives functionalise a space and provide memories and clues about our existence. Perec begins with the page and ascends to the world, implying that everything is interconnected. The fact that we live within complex spatial systems, as Perec demonstrates, provides us with a vital domestic order.

Furniture creates domestic space from otherwise neutral space, the act of furnishing space is essential. In *Species of Spaces*, Perec briefly defines the 'uninhabitable' by referring to the residue of war, modern housing estates, shanty towns, and the like.⁴⁹ The uninhabitable acts as a foil to his writing on domesticity, as it represents environments spoiled by human activities, the mediocrity of modern architecture, mean and 'airless' spaces, hostile and ugly places, institutions that incarcerate people, and domestic environments purely defined by fashion and lifestyle. He concludes the text by affirming the fragility of space, and his quest for stable spaces: 'I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted'.⁵⁰ This provides an answer to his early question regarding the

taking possession of a space and reflects his own anxieties about finding stability in a constantly changing Paris. Locating himself in a clearly defined order was important to Perec. This is reflected in his writing about himself, and the most banal aspects of life: the rooms he slept in, the things on his desk, what he ate, actions in a space, and how to organise a library.

How can reading Perec contribute to broader understandings about the relationships between the house/apartment and the city? There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn: (1) domestic space is inter-related across a broad range of scales; (2) the careful classification of spaces demonstrates many aspects of urban living; (3) the assignment of function to a space is to a certain extent arbitrary; (4) space, stories, and memory are intimately inter-related; (5) observing the infraordinary contributes

to a richness of living; (6) objects and things support and furnish a life. His work does not constitute an actual theory of domesticity, although it precisely describes a domestic order that provides a sense of belonging in a place. It is not a set of instructions, but it does provide a way to think about the infraordinary as something that passes or latches onto greater events. This attention to the minute aspects of an environment, albeit in the form of experimental literature, provides architects, interior designers, planners, landscape architects, and industrial designers with a way of considering how space is organised, and occupied. As Milan Kundera stated, a novel must 'discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence'.⁵¹ Perec's balancing of the infraordinary and the extraordinary is a demonstration of Kundera's challenge.

Notes

1. Raymond Queneau, 'Potential Literature', in Warren F. Motte Jr, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1998), p. 51.
2. Georges Perec, 'Approaches to What?', in Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 206.
3. Alison James, *Constraining Chance: Georges Perec and the Oulipo* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 198.
4. Tom Emerson, 'From Lieux to Place...', *AA Files*, 45/46 (winter 2001), 92.
5. See Georges Perec, 'The Rue Vilin', in *Species of Spaces*, pp. 208–17. See 'A City in Words and Numbers: A Conversation Between Jean-Charles Depaule and Pierre Getzler', *AA Files*, 45/46 (winter 2001).
6. Georges Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, trans. by David Bellos (Boston, MA: David R. Godine Publisher, 2010), p. 46.
7. Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by J. Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), pp. 220–2.
8. Cited in James, *Constraining Chance*, p. 194.
9. See Perec, *Species of Spaces*. See also David Bellos, 'Species of Spaces and Other Pieces by Georges Perec', *Translation Review*, 58:1 (1999), 53–7.
10. See also Charles and Ray Eames's film *Powers of Ten* produced in 1977.
11. The comparison with Russian dolls is also made in Emerson, 'From Lieux to Place...', p. 92.
12. Perec, *Species of Spaces*, p. 5.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
16. This was a failed project by Perec, originally titled *Lieux où j'ai dormi*. See also Georges Perec, 'Three Bedrooms Remembered', in *Thoughts of Sorts*, trans. by David Bellos (Boston, MA: David R. Godine Publisher, 2009).
17. Perec, *Species of Spaces*, pp. 21, 22.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
20. David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (Boston, MA: David R. Godine Publisher, 1993), pp. 532, 533.
21. Perec, *Species of Spaces*, pp. 26, 27.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–5.
29. Georges Perec, 'Statement of Intent', in *Thoughts of Sorts*, pp. 3, 4.
30. Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*, p. 626.
31. See Paul A. Harris, 'The Invention of Forms: Perec's "Life A User's Manual" and a Virtual Sense of the Real', *Substance*, 23:2, Issue 74 (1994).
32. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
33. Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*, p. 602. See also James, *Constraining Chance*, p. 147.
34. See Claude Burgelin and Joseph Mai, 'Georges Perec, or the Spirit of Beginnings', *Yale French Studies*, 105 (2004).
35. Stefanie Elisabeth Sobelle, 'The Novel Architecture of Georges Perec', in *Writing the Modern City: Literature, Architecture, Modernity*, ed. by S. Edwards and J. Charley (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p. 184.
36. Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual*, trans. by David Belloc (Boston, MA: David R. Godine Publisher, 2009), p. 3.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
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Competing interests

The author declares none.

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