

THE LANGUAGE OF GARDENS: IBN AL-,ARABI'S BARZAKH, THE COURTYARD GARDENS OF THE ALHAMBRA AND THE PRODUCTION OF SACRED SPACE

Language articulates the contents of the self in a *barzakh*, an isthmus—i.e., the breath—that is neither immaterial like the self, nor material like the external world. We know the *barzakh* is there because we experience its articulation, not least through enunciation and hearing spoken works. Language is intelligible, because the self is intelligent, and it is sensory, because it is perceived by sensation. Hence it is a world of imagination, a *barzakh* between awareness and embodiment, self and other. It is an image of the self and of the world outside the self. It is neither here nor there, neither this nor that. It clarifies and obscures, reveals and veils.¹

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Eye, hearing, and all
sensation
are aiders and helpers
of reason's acquisitions.

With the eye you will see the absent,
not with my arguments. (III 78.4)²

¹ William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-,Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), xxxiii.

² *Ibid.*, 261. (III 78.4). See Note 2, pg. 1.

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to propose a multilayered and interdisciplinary understanding of space by focussing on the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. By presenting a theoretical conversation on the Sufi notion of the *barzakh* (an intermediary and relational space) between the premodern Muslim mystic Ibn al-Arabi and contemporary western theorists concerned with space, movement and aesthetics, such as Louis Marin, Henri Lefebvre, Tim Ingold and Martin Seel, this thesis offers an original contribution to the spatial analysis of religion as embodied in the architecture, gardens, and imagination of the Alhambra. Emphasising the *barzakh*'s role in the interplay between presence and meaning this thesis also draws attention to the dialogue between self as spectator and the garden as spectacle. Through this dialogue, Ibn al-Arabi's concept of the *barzakh*, which he developed in terms of ontology, epistemology and hermeneutics, is investigated and analysed in order to identify a theory of knowledge that relies on the synthesis between experience and imagination. The union of meaning and presence afforded by the intermediary quality of the *barzakh* is further demonstrated in the physical, imaginative and virtual worlds of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. Viewing the Alhambra palaces and gardens in terms of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*, they produce their own language, a "showing" of their outer and inner movements, which prompts and provokes the spectator to participate in a poetical and creative encounter. Seen as a *barzakh*, these gardens put space into movement. Using the analogy of medieval Islamic travel genres such as *rihla* and *Ajā'ib*, this thesis shows that we can encounter these gardens through a sensory engagement with

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their architectural elements. Understood as a *barzakh*, the visual and haptic elements of these gardens are amplified and carried over in other media such as literature and film. The travel narrative “*Gringa Morisca*” by Sally Shivnan and the short film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* by Marie Menken serve as examples of the *barzakh*’s liminal and relational qualities. In essence, “*Gringa Morisca*” and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* show the exterior mapping of the Alhambra gardens as a *barzakh*, and simultaneously, also, the mapping of an interior and emotive journey in the self. On the one hand, “*Gringa Morisca*” and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* exhibit the *barzakh* in terms of a production of movement, sound and light. On the other hand, these two examples reveal the *barzakh* as a visual language in which embodied practise and imagination come together in a sensual and perceptual encounter. Emphasizing not only the spatial qualities of the *barzakh*, but also its sensory and imaginative characteristics, this thesis offers a challenge to the dominating emphasis on meaning and hermeneutical interpretation. Thus, moving away from the academic hegemony of space as only a medium of representation, this thesis proposes that space encountered as a *barzakh* has epistemological value for it allows a person to live creatively in the world. The *barzakh* stands in-between the self and the world, interpretation and aesthetic awareness, therefore, functioning at once reverentially and poetically. Using the *barzakh* as a methodical classifier of space can contribute to the ongoing debate centred on overcoming the opposition between the poetics and politics of space. Space identified as a *barzakh* offers us the means to move away from a

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subject and object, inner and outer, physical and emotional dichotomy. Through the lenses of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*, this thesis, thus, maps an epistemological, imaginative and aesthetic journey through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.

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<http://www.adriantylor.net/>

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Chapter One

Introduction: Transcending Boundaries

This morning I visited the Alhambra; an enchanted palace, whose exquisite beauty baffles the power of language to describe. Its outlines may be drawn, its halls and galleries, its court-yards and its fountains numbered; but what skilful limner shall portray in words its curious architecture, the grotesque ornaments, the quaint devices, the rich tracery of the walls, the ceilings inlaid with pearls and tortoise-shell? What language paint the magic hues of light and shade, the shimmer of the sunbeam as it falls upon the marble pavement and the brilliant panels inlaid with many-colored stones. Vague recollections fill my mind—images dazzling but undefined, like the memory of a gorgeous dream. They crowd my brain confusedly, but they will not stay; they change and mingle like the tremulous sunshine on the wave, till imagination itself is dazzled—bewildered—over-powered. . . . Cool through this lattice comes the summer wind. . . . Softly in yonder fountain falls the crystal water, dripping from its alabaster vase with never-ceasing sound! On every side comes up the fragrance of a thousand flowers, the murmur of innumerable leaves; and overhead is a sky where vapour floats—as soft, and blue, and radiant as the eye of childhood! Such is the Alhambra of Granada; a fortress—a palace—an earthly paradise; a ruin, wonderful in its fallen greatness.¹

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Now, when someone enters the path upon which we are travelling and desires to attain distinction . . . he should never allow himself to halt except in the *barzakh*. It is the imaginal station that has no *wujūd* save in imagination between the world of the witnessed and the world of the absent. (III 78.4)²

¹ Henry Wadsworth, *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1835), 129-131.

² William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 261. *Wujūd* is often translated as “existence” or “being,” but literally it means “finding.” Ibid., xix. The main source of Ibn al-ʿArabi I have consulted is *The Meccan Revelations* or *Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya*, ed. O. Yahia, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Hayʿat al-Misriyya al-ʿAmma li-Kitāb, 1972). I have relied on the extensive translations and commentary of *The Meccan Revelations* by William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of the Imagination* (Albany: State University

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Among the abundant literature on the Alhambra palace in Granada, the words written by the Mexican novelist and statesman, Carlos Fuentes, highlights the need for an alternative analysis for understanding the experience of place.³

[The Alhambra is] an extraordinary oasis of water and shade: a succession of gates and towers, rooms and courtyards give the Alhambra a sense of both containment and contentment, as if all the pleasures of the world could be had here at the reach of the hand and the eye. . . . [and people] suddenly be brought face to face with their own essence. . . . But during the daytime, or even at night one comes to understand that it is the constant fusion and coexistence of light, shadow, air, earth, sun, moon—that truly protect the heart of the Alhambra: its pools, its fountains, its outlets. . . . [where] the joys of art, the intellect and love can be experienced.⁴

The reference to an architectural space containing within itself a world, which as a result of its “in-between” quality is open to intersubjective experience and intellectual reflection, foregrounds the importance of defining a spatial category that transcends boundaries between meaning and presence. This challenge is the driving force of my thesis.

of New York Press, 1989) and *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). In my citations from either these two works that reproduce Chittick's translations from the *Futūḥāt*, Roman numerals referring to the volume and page number of the critical edition edited by O. Yahia will be placed in brackets after the quotation. Where translations by other translators have been used, appropriate reference is given in the notes.

³ In order to be clear about my use of the terms space and place, I want to point out that I use these two terms interchangeably. However, I have to emphasise that in most instances I have used the word space to indicate the theoretical and analytical quality associated with my spatial analysis of *barzakh* and place when referring to specific places such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. Important, however, is to remember that these terms are never used in opposition to one another; rather they fluctuate, being in a constant relationship with each other.

⁴ Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections of Spain and the New World* (New York: Mariner Books, 1992), 56, 57.

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The critical apparatus of this study focuses on understanding the *barzakh* as a liminal, in-between, neutral, or third space, whereby it becomes a space of power, growth and creativity. In this thesis I focus on a theory of knowledge rooted in an aesthetic experience of place, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. The key to my argument lies in understanding how the space of the *barzakh* simultaneously becomes an interpretative space opening the world up to multiple understandings and a physically experienced presence.

From this point of view, this thesis is an interdisciplinary venture that draws from various academic fields in order to establish an argument for a practice of place that is ultimately rooted in movement, experience and performance. However, my original contribution to knowledge is found in the academic field of Religious Studies.

Firstly, running like a rich vein throughout my theoretical engagement with the *barzakh* is an in-depth and sustained dialogue with the Sufi philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (A.H. 560-638/A.D. 1165-1240). Ibn al-Arabi, as William Chittick observes, presents us with the possibilities of preserving rationality while simultaneously transcending it and acts as —a beacon for those looking for an exit from the impasses of modern and postmodern thought.”⁵ For Ibn al-Arabi, the *barzakh*, as imagination, is granted ontological status; it becomes the world of the imagination.

The *barzakh* is something that separates a known from an unknown, an existent from a nonexistent, a negated from an affirmed, an intelligible

⁵ William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 2.

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from a non-intelligible. It is called *barzakh*, as a technical term (*iṣṭilāḥ*), and is in itself intelligible, but it is only imagination.⁶

William C. Chittick is the most important commentator on Ibn al-‘Arabi. His translations of and commentary on the *Futūḥāt*, or better known as *The Meccan Revelations*, provides the reader with an in-depth and clear-cut study of this great Sufi scholar. In *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Chittick also presents his readers with a thorough background on previous scholars' occupation with Ibn al-‘Arabi. As general background to Ibn al-‘Arabi, I found Stephen Hirtenstein's *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi* and Claude Addas's *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi* very useful and detailed resources.

Two vitally important studies, specifically on Ibn al-‘Arabi's world of the imagination, the *barzakh*, is that of Henry Corbin's *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabi* and Salman H. Bashier's *Ibn al-‘Arabi's Barzakh: The Concepts of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*. One of Henry Corbin's main concerns is the degradation of the Imagination into fantasy. Fantasy, according to Corbin, disallows the intermediate level between empirically verifiable reality and unreality and becomes only an exercise of thought without foundation in nature. From the Sufism of Ibn al-‘Arabi he builds an argument around the idea that the Godhead possesses the power of Imagination whereby the universe was created by an imagining God. Thus, there exists between the —niverse of

⁶ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-‘Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 118.

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pure spirit and the sensible world an intermediate world... this is the world over which the Imagination holds sway; that in it the Imagination produces effects so real they can —old” the imagining subject.”⁷

William Chittick subtly refers to Henry Corbin’s concern with his own philosophical project, whereby the lines between Corbin’s thoughts and Ibn al-Arabi’s sometimes become blurred.⁸ Perhaps running the same risk, my study tries to isolate Ibn al-Arabi’s use of the *barzakh*, while paying less attention to other pertinent backgrounds, the theological, social or biographical. Aspects of these backgrounds, as pointed out by Chittick, are conceivably more successfully covered by other analysts of Ibn al-Arabi.⁹

Salman H. Bashier’s excellent book manages to draw together Islamic and Western thought in an attempt to provide as he, himself, states: —critical examination of rational philosophical thought in general.” Focusing on Ibn Arabi’s concept of the Limit, he discusses the relationship between God and the world in an effort to promote a universal methodology of knowledge. For this end, and especially relevant to my own discussion of the *barzakh*, Bashier highlights the ontological aspect of the *barzakh*, found in the notion of the Third Thing. This is the intermediate reality of the Limit, which is

⁷ Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism Of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 182.

⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, xix.

⁹ Robert J. Dobie’s, *Logos and Revelation: Ibn 'Arabi, Meister Eckhart and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010) newly released book brings an interesting new perspective to the writings on Ibn al-Arabi. He approaches the mystic from a comparative point of view. Focusing on a hermeneutical approach towards the mystical text of Ibn al-Arabi and Meister Eckhart, he argues that mystical reflection is always embodied in a specific religious tradition which is informed by the revealed text and its interpretation.

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essentially the essence of each thing as it —meets the two limited things, between which it differentiates, with *two* faces that are *one*.”¹⁰

Secondly, by deconstructing Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* and mapping its characteristics on the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, I will show that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra can change from ordinary spaces into sacred space. The courtyard gardens, as a space of the *barzakh* can, within a specific cultural context, become “meaning” spaces that allows for a mystical interpretation of the garden's features. Through an aesthetic experience of the presence of the *barzakh*, these courtyard gardens synthesise bodily perception and meaning to induce an unsettling moment of epiphanic disclosure.

It should be pointed out, however, that terms such as space, place, experience, imagination and transcendence come with their own theoretical considerations. My use of these terms does not aim to delineate a particular theoretical scheme or advocate a specific theoretical school. They are consulted and employed in an attempt to identify and frame my own commentary on how the *barzakh* opens fields of discovery that can be explored. Employed as interpretative tools, these terms come together, forming a *bricolage*, so to speak, for this particular purpose alone, however, not without sometimes challenging some conventional theoretical perspectives.

¹⁰ Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 7-9.

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Thus, taking my cue from the often quoted observation by Michel Foucault that the —~~present~~ epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed,” I explore the existence of a space not defined by being either-or, but by being both.¹¹ Therefore, the first question I shall address will be the juxtaposition of the *barzakh* and concepts of space in order to argue for a spatial perspective on the *barzakh*. By understanding the *barzakh* within the parameters of such an interpretative topology, a model open to investigation is created. Within this model it will be possible to broach questions of space, experience and aesthetics in order to find answers capable of defusing the often divisive epistemological conceptions of current academic positions on these matters. Contributing to this argument are the theories of Michel Foucault on heterotopia, Henri Lefebvre on the production of space and Louis Marin on the neutral. By situating the *barzakh* as an answer to the question of whether there is a space that can transcend given dualities, I am exploring the possibility of a space that holds within itself the ability to negotiate between the existent and imaginary, which draws into itself that which is and that which is not. As heterotopic and neutral space, the *barzakh* informs a practice of space, which, as John Sallis proposes, recognises imagination as the meaning of Being.

Is the meaning of Being not, then, a matter of imagination? Is it not imagination that in its flight opens to the shining of the beautiful? Is it not imagination that in its hovering spans the gigantic space of sense, thus

¹¹ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, —“Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22.

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gathering now what would previously have been called the horizon, the meaning, of Being? Is imagination not precisely this gathering? Is imagination not the meaning of Being?¹²

Keeping the above quote in mind, the second issue I will address is the fact that the *barzakh* as a space of the imagination is never static and inert. I will argue that similar to the anthropologist Tim Ingold's insight that life is lived along a path of movement or wayfaring, the *barzakh* brings divergent perspectives together in a sensual experience of light, sound, feeling and ultimately storytelling.¹³ Turning to theories of aesthetic perception, I will move from the more general discussion of the *barzakh* to a more specific discussion of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as spaces of the *barzakh*. Building on Gernot Böhme's theories of atmosphere and Mikel Dufrenne's theories of aesthetic sensuousness, I develop an aesthetic appreciation of the *barzakh* in terms of Martin Seel's —aesthetics of appearing."¹⁴ I will show how the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra are especially appropriate for demonstrating the imaginative, sensual and transcendent quality of the *barzakh*. On the one hand, these gardens are part of the physical architecture of the Alhambra, which is imbued with specific meanings and representations, exclusively pertinent to Islam. On the other hand, the physical presence of these gardens has a universal appeal, which does not depend on any specific intellectual content or religious enculturation. Rather, the gardens' appeal is found in the immediate

¹² John Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 97.

¹³ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xii.

¹⁴ Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. by John Farrell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

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emotional response they provoke. This argument, then, will be the heart of my thesis, whereby I focus attention on how the architectural spaces of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra become, in the experience of the beholder, places filled with meaning and sensual presence.

Thus, although this research builds on previous work, especially work focused on overcoming existent dualities between embodiment and representation, it does not argue for more emphasis on either bodily experience or on interpretation. Rather, this thesis focuses attention on how a specific place can be both bodily experience and imaginative interpretation and when recognised as such can result in an epiphanic journey of discovery. This focal point will be demonstrated through the practical examples of the travel narrative “*Gringa Morisca*” by Sally Shivnan and the short film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* by Marie Menken.¹⁵ Through applying the lens of the *barzakh* to these examples, I argue for a perception of space that allows for a transcendent experiential dimension that is neither a —specific increase in insight and knowledge, nor a beneficial, pious affection, but discovering afresh, as if taken by surprise, an uncanny

¹⁵ Sally Shivnan, “*Gringa Morisca*.” In *The Best Travel Writing 2005: True Stories from Around the World*, ed. James O’Reilly, Larry Habegger and Sean O’Reilly (San Francisco: Travellers’ Tales, 2005), 125-137. Sally Shivnan is a senior lecturer and director of the Writing and Rhetoric Division at UMBC’s English Department. She has won multiple awards for her short stories including the 2011 Travel Classics International travel writing contest. Marie Menken (born Marie Menkevicius, May 25, 1909–December 29, 1970), was an American socialite, painter and experiential filmmaker. Menken is noted for her unique filming style that not only showed influences from her background in painting, but also incorporated collage and the movement of a free handheld camera. In 2007, Menken’s *Glimpse of the Garden* (1957) was selected for preservation in the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress. To view *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* for Kenneth Anger go to <http://www.ubu.com/film/menken.html>

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dimension of reality, an uncircumscribed realm to which one feels open.”¹⁶

Referring to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s call for a production of presence beyond meaning, I argue that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra present themselves as spaces of the *barzakh*, which allows for an aesthetic, relational and emotional encounter, not removed from interpretation, but as a synchronization of both interpretation and presence.

The space of the *barzakh* allows us to engage both the physical and imaginative dimensions of the Alhambra. With an emphasis on both a physical and imaginative encounter with the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, this thesis emphasises a tangible relationship between subject and object. Through this relationship, knowledge of being-in-the-world transforms from being merely world-interpretation into world-participation. I am, thus, interested in showing that the *barzakh* entails an epistemology rooted in the act of revelation and concealment, presence and absence. From this position it is possible to claim that spaces become sacred not because of any specific hermeneutical approach or from a specific search for deeper meanings. Rather, these spaces are experienced as sacred because of the establishment of a relationship between interpretation and presence in a perceptual, aesthetic and performative encounter that ultimately elicits an emotional response.

¹⁶ Louis O.P. Roy, *Transcendent Experiences: Phenomenology and Critique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 3.

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CURRENT RESEARCH

My goal in this thesis is to take an interdisciplinary approach to reflecting on an intermediary space that forefronts a mode of being-in-the-world that relies on the relationship between a physical body-in-space and an imaginative, performative and aesthetic encounter. Here I will highlight those lines of current research that in some way or another touches my own research. To that effect, I divide these studies into two main groups. Firstly, there are those studies that reflect on issues of space from a phenomenological point of view, highlighting the importance of the body and the senses in spatial practice and experience. Secondly, certain studies approach space from a hermeneutical point of view, emphasizing the role of language and interpretation in spatial practice and experience.

The importance of Henri Lefebvre for understanding the role of space in religion has already been explored by Kim Knott in *The Location of Religion*. In this book Knott develops a spatial methodology by which to show a relationship between religion and the physical, social and cultural. After developing a broad understanding of space and place in the first half of her book, Knott proceeds in the second half to develop a closer analysis of the role of religion in the body-space of the left hand. She also gives a very succinct summary of some of the scholarly legacy associated with space and religion.¹⁷

¹⁷ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005).

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Two studies that focus particularly on movement, relation and the body in order to reflect on a theory of religion that specifically addresses the religious life of transnational migrants and immigrants are the works of Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, and Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialistic Theory of Religion*. Both studies argue that a new theory of religion should take in account the strongly embodied character of religious practices among people in motion and migration.¹⁸

My own study moves away from the physical, social, cultural and religious partnerships explored by these authors towards an emphasis on a relational third-space that is at once imaginative and physical. These aspects, however, are never left behind because they constantly, inform, mediate and participate in the intermediate reality of the *barzakh*. Furthermore, my critical analysis of the spatiality of the *barzakh* is practically explored in the specific architectural spaces of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.

The importance of focussing on specific architectural spaces in the understanding of cultural and religious spatial practice is also the subject matter of Simon O'Meara's book, *Space and Muslim Life: At the Limits of the Labyrinth of Fez*. Analyzing the labyrinth spaces of Fez with reference to the *Book of Walls*, O'Meara argues that structural features, such as walls and thresholds, hold significant value in the production of a premodern Muslim urban space. Important to my research is his discussion of Henry Lefebvre's

¹⁸ Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialistic Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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theory of the production of space to illustrate that space is never an isolated phenomenon, but always part of a comprehensive bodily experience.¹⁹

The next group of authors' contribution to space and religion falls into the second group of scholars more definitely focussed on discourse and the representation of space. In *Mysticism & Space: Space and Spatiality in the Works of Richard Rolle, The Cloud of Unknowing Author and Julian of Norwich*, Carmel Bendon Davis presents an informed background to mysticism and space and follows this with an ingenious understanding of experience made up of different layers; on the outside is physical space, followed by social space. Traversing these layers, however, are the space of text and the language of space.

A mystical topography, developing out of the space of texts and the language of space, is also taken up by Mette B. Bruun in *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux's Mapping of Spiritual Topography*. In part one she presents the reader with a background of the textual representation of topography with a focus on the ways Bernard represents Biblical topography.²⁰ In *Transcending Space: Architectural Places in the Works of Henry David Thoreau, E.E. Cummings and John Barth*, Taimi Olsen shows how space can become dynamic, complex, interrelated, transcendent and multi-centred. Discussing the dynamism of space by referring to the works of selected authors, Olsen paves the way for spatial representations to move beyond metaphor, allowing

¹⁹ Simon O'Meara, *Space and Muslim Life: At the Limits of the Labyrinth of Fez* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

²⁰ Mette B. Bruun and A.J. Vanderjagt, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux's Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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for space to develop into a transcendent space open to self-expansion. Taimi Olsen's book explores aspects of the spatial imagination through a close reading of these writers —“anonymic” use of architectural structures in literature, by which she demonstrates the —“symbiotic connection between literary space and physical or —real space.”²¹

In Islamic Studies, Samer Akkach's *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* brings another perspective to the argument. He underlines the notion of a spatial sensibility, shaped by a complex and multi-layered world-view, carried through into art, religion, creativity and spirituality.²² In *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture*, Valérie Gonzalez focuses on a philosophical discussion of beauty. She emphasises that although the concept of beauty cannot be removed from ideas of the sacred, the perceptual experience of beauty, especially afforded by Islamic architecture such as the Alhambra palace in Granada, plays an important role in aesthetic appreciation.²³

Whereas these scholarly approaches have tended to deal with either a bodily interaction with space or the representation and interpretation of spatial structures, I will approach the issue from the perspective that the *barzakh* allows us to analyse space in terms of both embodiment and imagination. Furthermore, I will claim that it is in this interactive encounter of movement, perception and emotion that the liminal in-betweenness of the *barzakh*

²¹ Taimi Olsen, *Transcending Space: Architectural Places in the Works of Henry David Thoreau, E.E. Cummings and John Barth* (London: Associated University Press, 2000), 9.

²² Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

²³ Valérie Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture* (New York: Islamic Publications, 2001).

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effects an aesthetic experience, which enables us to move beyond ourselves to witness that which is —other” than ourselves.

METHOD

This thesis explores the epistemological and aesthetic interface between Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*, the Courtyard gardens of the Alhambra and the production of sacred space. Therefore, the method I employ in this thesis is dialectical, involving a conversation in comparative philosophy and epistemology.

Ibn al-Arabi wrote that there are three objects of knowledge; the first Nondelimited Being or Necessary Being, the second nondelimited nothingness, which is in itself, nonexistence and the third, which by its very essence stands opposite these two things, the Supreme *Barzakh*. Thus, the Supreme *Barzakh* is the third known thing and —within it are all the possible things. It is infinite, just as each of the two known things is infinite.”²⁴ It can be argued that this epistemological qualification of *waḥdat al wujūd* forms the basis of the dialectical rhythms of Ibn al-Arabi's writings. It is in the dynamic unfolding of the essence of *waḥdat al wujūd* that Ibn al-Arabi's writings assume a dialectical methodology, which Salman Bashier explains as having a —motion of actuality that signifies the ceaseless unfolding of reality and its emergence into ever higher levels of unity.”²⁵ R. W. J. Austin explains that

²⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi path of Knowledge*, 204. (III 46.27, 47.25) See also Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 171 for her discussion of triplicity in Ibn al-Arabi's thought.

²⁵ Bashier, *Ibn al-Arabi's Barzakh*, 5. Bashier also points out that Ibn al-Arabi's dialectic is not a static unity or merely a formal principle as found in the dialectic of Hegel's thesis, antithesis and synthesis principle. However, there exist remarkable similarities between the

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Ibn al-ʿArabī makes it clear that unity alone is not creative and that there is within it no implication of becoming or development. It is also true for duality and unless there is a working relationship between the two, they are only two independent entities, sterile and in contradictory relationship with one another. For these two entities to be in a relationship they need a connecting principle that relates to both entities. This, then, is a third thing, born from their coming together and bringing their separating qualities together. Austin explains that —this is the familiar triplexity of knower-knowledge-known in which the term ‘knowledge’ as relationship brings together the receptive objectivity of the known and the active subjectivity of the knower to produce the principle of knowledge itself.”²⁶ Truth is, therefore, recognizing both the oneness of singularity and the oneness of plurality, but also recognizing that only in synthesis these two principles can become dynamic and creative expressions of reality.

Chittick observes that in his explanation of *wujūd*, Ibn al-ʿArabī highlights the essence of *wujūd* through many different contexts while continuously adding nuances to his original thoughts. Thus, the point Ibn al-ʿArabī makes does not lie in any simple formulation of *waḥdat al wujūd*. Rather, the point lies in the very act of constantly reforming and reframing the idea of *waḥdat al wujūd* in order to reshape his reader’s imagination. In each new context Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses *waḥdat al wujūd*, he —demonstrates the intimate inward

two. Both thinkers’ dialectic encompasses the idea of permanence and change, constancy and flux, and the relationship between self and object, p. 150, note 17. See also Bashier’s discussion of the origin of dialectics, p. 150, note 16.

²⁶ R. W. J. Austin, Introductory Notes to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, by Ibn al-ʿArabī (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 139-142.

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interrelationship among phenomena basing himself on a great variety of texts drawn from the Koran, Hadith, Kalam, Philosophy, Cosmology, Arabic grammar, and other sources.”²⁷ Chittick also states that this dialectical thought of Ibn al-Arabi can be considered visionary. Ibn al-Arabi is not trying to reach a conclusion or build a specific philosophical system; his writings sometimes take systematic form and other times contradict systematic formulations he has made before. The main purpose of his writing is to communicate a vision of reality and in that effort his communication turns to logical, philosophical and theological discourse, exegesis of the *Qur’an* and Hadith, as well as poetry.²⁸

Sadiyya Shaikh claims that the dialectical mode of Ibn al-Arabi allows him to present, within language, with all its inherent limitations, thoughts and ideas that transcend normative and established patterns and deliberations. Ibn al-Arabi’s dialectic allows for multiple interpretations and as it embraces the fluid nature of a Sufi method in which there are always deep layers of meaning present, it functions both as a dialectical method and as a site of spiritual dynamics. Ibn al-Arabi’s dialectical method serves as a harmonizing and constructive principle, recognizing the fact that knowledge is always infinitely layered and expansive. Such an approach moves away from a dualistic and divisive methodology and recognises the interdependency of a

²⁷ William C. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 73. See also Chittick’s discussion of the term *wujūd*, 74-76. Chittick also points out that Ibn al-Arabi never formally used the term *wahdat al wujūd*, but that it was coined by his followers to become part of an Akbarian metaphysics.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 73, 74. See also Chapter Four, Note 15, 16, p. 148.

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subject and object in an —organic hermeneutic of humility and openness.”²⁹

Shaikh concludes that this epistemological approach, in which reality is constantly unfolding into new meanings and insights, is theoretically more open to the ways in which truth claims are constantly shifting. A dialectical methodology captures a —multivalent ambiguity” that allows for fresh insights as it simultaneously integrates and transcends normative theoretical understandings and thought patterns.³⁰

This emphasis on —crossing over,” the continuous movement from absence to presence, seeking and finding, forms the structure of Ibn al-Arabi's dialectical methodology. As a truly holistic approach, this methodological philosophy creates frameworks for collaborative creativity, opens up new horizons and confirms existing possibilities. Thus, within this thesis I adopt a dialectical mode of thinking. This is done not only to highlight the importance of collaborative creativity within a comparative philosophy of religion, but this mode of thinking also allows me to explore experiences, meanings, perceptions and feelings using interdisciplinary research strategies. Reading and studying other theorists concerned with space, gardens and aesthetics and exploring the physical characteristics of the Alhambra gardens, I develop new ideas to help me frame the *barzakh* as a multi-focal lens for viewing spaces such as the Alhambra gardens.

Thus, writing this thesis in a predominant climate of suspicion, where the political is often emphasised over the poetical, my aim is to show that spatial

²⁹ Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn Arabi, Gender, and Sexuality* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 113-115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120, 227.

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practice, taking account of an aesthetics of appearing, can play an important role in establishing meaning. Richard Kearney explains that poetics includes —the threefold function of cultivating (*colere*), constructing (*aedificare*) and letting dwell by unfolding something into the fullness of its being (*producere*).³¹ Exploiting the opportunities presented by a dialectical methodology, I will, through what Joseph Frank calls “lyric organisation,” attempt my own poetics by cultivating, constructing and producing an argument highlighting the imaginative and epistemological possibilities inherent in the idea of the *barzakh*.³² Lyrical organization conveys to the reader an awareness of an idea in play. Through this play specific themes are highlighted, very much like the performance of a musical symphony, where the overall effect depends on motion and imaginative synchronization. Therefore, lyrical organization allows me to adopt a creative stance and stamp my own imprint onto the analysis of the *barzakh* and its unfolding in the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.

Following Ibn al-Arabi's lead, I am proposing a thesis staged as a presentation subtly tracing connections in order to show how the *barzakh* affords a sensual, imaginative and emotional spatial encounter. This thesis, then, in the nature of multivalence, develops in a layered fashion. Within this process I employ a variety of research strategies in order to frame my own arguments and create analytical and heuristic tools to situate my mapping of the spatiality of the *barzakh*. As these strategies are relevant to specific

³¹ Richard A. Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), xiii.

³² Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 84.

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chapters, they will be discussed in more detail in the chapter outline of those chapters.

Although this thesis crosses boundaries between multiple disciplines and many voices can be heard, I am fully aware of the theoretical differences between these theorists, not only in terms of background and era, but also in terms of contextual and institutional positions. I want to make it explicit from the outset that my use of such an interdisciplinary approach is not a naive borrowing. Rather, it is done from a value-orientated point of view, very much in terms of a holistic approach in which the different voices complement and sustain the dialogue. From an epistemological perspective, these scholars become relevant as their voices add to my argument, pulling together analytical potential from various fields in order to adequately consider the dynamic character of the *barzakh*.

In an authentic thematic approach, each chapter builds upon the previous chapter, not in the sense of one building block fitting exactly upon the other, but as a process of mapping or wayfinding. Each succeeding chapter draws on significant relationships and meaningful interactions to create new associations and visualizations, finally culminating in an overall presentation of the *barzakh* as a space that renders the invisible visible.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

After introducing the thesis in Chapter One, *Transcending Boundaries*, Chapter Two, *“Betwixt and Between”: The Barzakh and Heterotopia*, introduces a theoretical discussion of the *barzakh* as a limit space, which

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simultaneously defines and divides. In this chapter, I turn to the theories of Ibn al-Arabī on the *barzakh* in order to develop a heuristic tool that highlights the existence of a liminal reality that is both real and unreal. I will be focussing attention on specific qualities and characteristics of the *barzakh* by highlighting similar qualities in Michel Foucault's heterotopia and Louis Marin's neutral. By taking the methodological stance that the *barzakh*, as heterotopia, offers us an epistemological and discursive reality, I will position the *barzakh* as an imaginative and neutral space, where the conceptual divide between inside and outside, the real and unreal, is collapsed.

Chapter Three, *The Alhambra: Gardens of Light and Shadow*, explores the mirroring of the characteristics of the *barzakh* onto the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. I will be questioning how the spatial characteristics of a courtyard garden, and specifically the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, can influence the overall garden experience. In this chapter I am entering the garden through its architectural framework in order to read its mirroring of a space within a definite premodern Islamic vocabulary. To address this question, I will in essence apply, Wolfgang Iser's "theory of aesthetic response" whereby the *barzakh* becomes not a static entity, but a reservoir of potential.³³ From this perspective, the reader of the text plays an active role in the production of meaning and emotion. Knowledge, then, is the result of the imagination's ability to take us outside of ourselves in an experience that challenges traditional categories that presume a dichotomy between sensory appreciation and intellectual understanding. Text and reader are partners in a

³³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), ix.

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relationship which has as its aim a reaction on the part of the reader. Iser calls this process a practice of re-creative dialectics, where the aesthetic response of the reader is the result of a dialectical relationship between text and reader. It is an aesthetic response instigated by the text, which also brings into play the perceptive and imaginal faculties of the reader in order for her/him to adjust her/his own focus. Here the literary work becomes not a documentary record of pre-existing facts but rather a —formation of an already formulated reality, which brings into the world something that did not exist before.”³⁴ Emphasis is not only on interpretation and the discovery of underlying, individualised nuances which could be functional, symbolic or transcending. There is also the recognition of an emergence of presence in the play between sensual form and imaginative pattern.

The focus of Chapter Four, *The Alhambra: A Journey of Discovery*, is a transition from the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as merely representations of the *barzakh* to physically experiencing the *barzakh* while journeying through the gardens. Chapter Four can essentially be considered as a fulcrum between mapping the Alhambra gardens in Chapter Three and moving through the Alhambra gardens in Chapter Five. Paying attention to the opportunities that the Arabic travel narrative offers as an analytical tool allows me to develop the *barzakh* into an imaginative and aesthetic encounter. Methodologically, this chapter creates opportunities to analyse a particular concept from multiple angles in order to transcend existing boundaries and illuminate more complex interrelationships. Important to this

³⁴ Iser, *The Act of Reading*, x.

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discussion will be Giuliana Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*.³⁵ Bruno introduces us to a haptic way of site-seeing, which, as she illustrates through a discussion of the picturesque in garden aesthetics, engenders an emotional response.

Chapter Five, *The Alhambra: Presence and Absence* is the culmination of what Henry Miller terms writing as —spiral form.”³⁶ Miller claims that this mode of writing allows him to highlight the inner pattern of things. In Chapter Five I highlight the inner patterns of the courtyard gardens by turning to the travel narrative of Sally Shivnan, —*Gringa Morisca*,” and the short film by Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. In these two examples, the presence and absence of the *barzakh* are established by the coming together of the actual garden spaces, bodily experience and imagination. Both examples show these relational encounters as becoming indistinguishable from each other in effecting a spiral illusion of continuous outward and inward motion.³⁷ Therefore, my aim in this chapter is to show that by reading the travel narrative of Sally Shivnan or watching the short film by Marie Menken, a person is constantly drawn outwards to the physical qualities exhibited by the *barzakh* and inwards to the recognition of the *barzakh* as a mode of being-in-the world.

Chapter Six, *Conclusion: The Barzakh, an Epiphanic Journey* concludes my argument that a *barzakh*, in itself, is a layered and diverse term. Not only

³⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

³⁶ Henry Miller, *Henry Miller on Writing* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 120.

³⁷ On spiral illusion and spiral form in writing see James Decker, *Henry Miller and Narrative Form: Constructing the Self, Rejecting Modernity* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 25.

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does it function as a discourse of space, but it gives structure and meaning to everyday spatial practice in that it affords a multiplication of opportunities and ways to experience and interpret places such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. Most importantly, as an aesthetic experience of presence, the *barzakh* highlights the coming into existence of a new world, which acts as a medium for personal growth and enhancement.

Tom Conley talks about adopting a —snail's sense” when embarking on the act of poetical mapping. The snail goes about feeling the space with its horns, accustoming itself to its surroundings and when encountering obstacles drawing its horns back within itself. Through a haptic eye the snail —touches the world,” moving along in two ways while tasting, grasping and experiencing the world. Therefore, Conley argues, a snail experiences and —sees” truths, which are simultaneously concealed and revealed.³⁸ Furthermore, continuing the analogy of the snail, Conley claims that the ocular spiral of a snail's shell brings to mind both —inward and outward, from a place touched and felt to areas unfathomed, unknown, seen once here and there.”³⁹ As such, in the act of poetic mapping the poet is tasked to present a world—a world, which is simultaneously felt and seen.

Thus, after a journey poetically mapping the spaces of the *barzakh*, my final chapter presents this —in-between” world of the *barzakh* as a place filled with wonder, an in-between, neutral and heterotopic space. It is my aim to show that when recognised as such, places like the courtyard gardens of the

³⁸ Tom Conley, *An Errant Eye: Poetry and Topography in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1-26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

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Alhambra can transform into life-enhancing scenes imbued with transcendental force.

Therefore, my central argument in this thesis is that the *barzakh* is a spatial category that enables us to map spatial practice in terms of meaning and experience. Current research on the topic shows an increasing awareness, on the one hand, of the important role objects play in the subject-object relational encounter that makes up spatial practices. In *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett claims, “I want to highlight what is typically cast in the shadow: the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, the emphasis on embodied experience brought its own set of questions, especially concerning the experience of Virtual Worlds common in the multi-user virtual environment of the internet. In an essay stressing the existence of Virtual Worlds in stories and cinema, even before the introduction of the internet, Maria Beatrice Bittarello points out the importance of the imagination and the mythopoeic activity of the players in establishing an alternative, mythical and often religious space. She argues against the definition of cyberspace as a disembodied and alien experience. Rather, it is “something else,” which allows for freedom, but always integrated into a person’s overall experience of the world.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), ix.

⁴¹ Maria Beatrice Bittarello, “Another Time, Another Space: Virtual Worlds, Myths and Imagination,” *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research: Past, Present & Future* 1.1 (2008), <http://journals.tdl.org/jvwr/index.php/jvwr/article/view/282/236> (accessed July 20, 2013) See also her essay “Spatial Metaphors Describing the Internet and Religious Websites: Sacred Space and Sacred Place” *Observatorio (OBS*)* 3.4 (2009)

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Therefore, instead of critiquing, reviewing or discussing these studies, my purpose is to open up a new discussion by pointing out a concept that allows for the merging of intellectual, imaginative and emotional qualities and haptic experience to create its own transcendent reality. It is with this task in mind that I focus on both the physical gardens of the Alhambra, and their virtual reality in literature and film. These examples effectively demonstrate how the multi-dimensional concept of the *barzakh* exhibits a specific mode of existence that does not reside in abstract theories and representations alone, but is found on the threshold of our aesthetic encounter with place and the emotional recognition of our inner self. The implication of highlighting the relational and creative possibilities inherent in the *barzakh* allows us to look at space from a synchronised double perspective; on the one hand focussing on the social and political factors inherent in representation and on the other hand, focussing on the aesthetic and emotional experience of presence.

It is, therefore, the aim of this thesis to develop the *barzakh*'s intrinsically ambiguous qualities in order to formulate a language that explores, visualise, describes and creates the interrelationships between space, the garden and the self.

<http://www.obs.obercom.pt/index.php/obs/article/view/237> (accessed July 20, 2013) for her discussion of the use of spatial metaphors to define the internet as sacred space, as well as the construction of sacred places and religious identity by internet users. Bittarello concludes with pointing out that these spaces are often both real and metaphorical. See also Gernot Böhme, "The Space of Bodily Presence and Space as a Medium of Representation," in *Transforming Spaces: The Topological Turn in Technology Studies*, eds. Mikael Hård, Andreas Lösch and Dirk Verdicchio, <http://www.ifs.tu-darmstadt.de/fileadmin/gradkoll//Publikationen/transformingspaces.html> (accessed September 15, 2011) and Böhme, "On Beauty," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 39 (2010): 22–33. (<http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/nja/article/view/3001> (accessed, September 15, 2011) for his observation on beauty and presence in a modern, technological age.

Chapter Two

“Betwixt and Between”: The Barzakh and Heterotopia

To be brought to limit it must be unlimited; not the limited but the unlimited is the subject of limitation, since between the limited and the unlimited there is no intermediate to accept the principle of limitation.¹

≈

The limit accompanies everything in knowledge and delimitation accompanies the limit in consideration. (IV 145. 27)²

≈

Wherever the infinite touches the finite there are three dimensions, for example those of space, music (melody, harmony, rhythm), language (syntagma, paradigm, symbolism), etc. Is there ever a two-term relationship, except in representation? There are always Three. There is always the Other.³

≈

Heterotopia: the other place, the place of the other, simultaneously excluded and interwoven.⁴

≈

My definition of the Neutral remains structural, by which I mean that, for me, the Neutral doesn't refer to "impressions" of greyness, of "neutrality," of indifference. The Neutral—my Neutral—can refer to intense, strong unprecedented states. "To outplay the paradigm" is an ardent, burning activity.⁵

¹ Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 311.

² William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 81.

³ Henri Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, ed. Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman (New York: Continuum, 2003), 50.

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 128.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Les rites de passage* Arnold van Gennep was the first to make use of the concept of the liminal in social anthropology. He claimed that between preliminary rites of separation and postliminal rites of integration, there was a third category, that of the liminal. In his arguments people in this third category were no longer part of the first category, but had not yet moved on to the second. They were in a process of transition, in limbo, so to say, between the two phases of their lives.⁶

Building on this idea of the liminal, Victor Turner used the phrase —“betwixt and between.” Quoting the German mystic Jacob Boehme’s well known statement, —“In Yea and Nay all things consist,” he determined that liminality —“may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.”⁷

Jacob Boehme’s quote and Victor Turner’s subsequent observation recalls the often recounted meeting that took place between the young Ibn al-‘Arabī and the well-known philosopher Ibn Rushd. During this encounter Ibn al-‘Arabī was eagerly questioned about his spiritual experiences and afterwards he described the meeting as follows:

⁶ Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 11.

⁷ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93, 97.

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He said, –How did you find the situation in unveiling and divine effusion? Is it what rational consideration gives us?” I replied, –Yes and no. Between the yes and the no spirits fly from their matter and heads from their bodies.” (I 154)⁸

Already here Ibn al-Arabī hinted at a concept he would fully develop in his writings, the idea of an in-between space that can break through the binary thought processes that gives us a world divided into opposites.

My interest in this thesis lies with the intersection of space, perception and imagination and how the topography of the Alhambra gardens can be interpreted as a space, an emotive space at once real and unreal, subjective and objective, physical and mental. In Chapter One I have referred to a dialectical methodology as a pattern of deliberate and calculated procedures with the intention of arriving at a collective result. I have called this method layering, whereby I will present the reader with an idea, space as the *barzakh*, and while keeping this idea in mind will add to it multiple levels of associated ideas in order to extrapolate its hidden qualities and layers of meaning. My aim is to bring to the reader’s attention the multi-faceted concept I envision in the notion of the *barzakh*.

Following this method, this chapter can be seen as formulating and reflecting upon those concepts that will allow me to read the gardens of the Alhambra as a text open to interpretation on the one hand, but also on the other, a space which allows for a physical and sensuous aesthetic experience of its specific qualities, which in the process unlocks different modes of knowledge production.

⁸ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, xiii.

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Working within this methodology, I will firstly identify and develop Ibn al-Arabi's notion of the *barzakh*. After an initial definition of the term *barzakh*, I will focus on Ibn al-Arabi's use of the *barzakh* as a liminal space, especially its paradoxical nature as explained by Salman Bashier. Taking this methodological point of departure, it will be possible to assimilate the idea of the *barzakh* as the space between, assigning to it a Thirdspace epistemology rooted in the idea of being and becoming.⁹

In the remainder of the chapter I will focus on certain other classifications of space, such as heterotopia and the neutral, analogous to my understanding of the *barzakh*. For this purpose, I turn to Michel Foucault and his proposal of heterotopia as an alternative understanding of relational ordering, Hugh Silverman and his appreciation of heterotopia within a utopian and dystopian discourse and Louis Marin and his development of a space which he terms the neutral.

An important contribution to this process, this following of an itinerary along a route of ideas is the arguments of Henri Lefebvre and his notion of a “lived space,” both imaginative and real. It is in this space that the relationship between body and space come into play:

⁹ The concept of Thirdspace is taken from Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996). Soja developed a Thirdspace epistemology to broaden and open existing binaries between mental space and imagined space. Thirdspace includes Firstspace, which is the material perception of spatial qualities and Secondspace, the ideas about those perceptions of space. However, Thirdspace is not only the combination of these two aspects, as it is also the development of new and different possibilities growing out of the combination of first and second space in “lived space.” Thirdspace is, thus, a space that is something more, something else, for it offers one the possibility of overturning existing binaries and in the process becoming something new, something —~~other~~.”

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Objects touch one another, feel, smell and hear one another. Then they contemplate one another with eye and gaze. One truly gets the impression that every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-renewed to-and-fro or reciprocal reflection, an interplay of shifting colours, lights and forms.¹⁰

This chapter is not an attempt to analyse or critique these theories. Rather, it is the drawing up of a new map, but one that follows on the routes of others in order to find new routes to embark upon. For maps, as Gilles Deleuze wrote, are —superimposed in such a way that each map finds itself modified in the following map, rather than finding its origin in the preceding one: from one map to the next. . . . Every map is a redistribution of impasses and breakthroughs, of thresholds and enclosures.”¹¹

Taking my cue from them I will attempt to map a space —~~at~~twixt and between,” as a space of perception, movement and transition, a space that opens up vision, and as such, a space that can re-focus knowledge formation and perhaps, paradoxically, become a place of transcendence.¹²

THE BARZAKH

The Arabic-English dictionary defines *barzakh* as an —interval, gap, break, partition, bar, obstruction; isthmus.”¹³ Paying closer attention to these terms defining *barzakh* it will be noticed that there are subtle differences in

¹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1974), 183.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), 63.

¹² Transcendence here understood in the context of going beyond or exceeding ordinary limits.

¹³ J. Milton Cowan, ed., *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 52.

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meaning. Take, for example, the etymology of the word interval, which comes from the Latin *intervallum* (space between, interval, distance, interval of time, pause, difference; literally, space between two palisades or walls), thus, *inter* (between) and *vallum* (palisade, wall). Compare that to the etymology and meaning of the word obstruction, from the Latin *obstructionem* (a building up), *obstructus*, pp. of *obstruere* (block up, build up, hinder), thus *ob* (against) and *struere* (to pile, build).¹⁴

It becomes clear, from this comparison, that even in its function of separating between two things, or not allowing them to mix, there is an intrinsic ambiguity implied by the word *barzakh*. On the one hand it indicates a *hidden* space between two entities, on the other, a *known* obstruction that differentiates between two things. An ambiguity that will become the very ground stone of Ibn al-Arabi's understanding of the *barzakh*. He describes it as follows:

A *barzakh* is something that separates (*Fāṣil*) two other things while never going to one side (*mutaṭarrif*), as for example the line that separates shadow from sunlight. . . . Though sense perception might be incapable of separating the two things, the rational faculty judges that there is a barrier (*ḥājiz*) between them which separates them. The intelligible barrier is the *barzakh*. If it is perceived by the senses it is one of the two things, not the *barzakh*. Any two adjacent things are in need of a *barzakh* which is neither the one nor the other, but which possesses the power (*quwwa*) of both. . . . For when you perceive it and are intelligent, you will know that you have perceived an ontological thing (*shay' wujūdī*) upon which your eyes have fallen. But you will know for certain by proofs that there is nothing there in origin and root. So what is

¹⁴ Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <http://www.etymonline.com/> (accessed June 08, 2011).

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this thing for which you have affirmed an ontological thingness and from which you have negated that thingness in the state of your affirming it? (I 304.16)¹⁵

Salman Bashier explains the role of the *barzakh* as the differentiator between two entities which possess opposite properties. Even though the *barzakh* differentiates between the two, it is not only its function to prevent the two entities mixing with one another, but it also unites them. He continues by stating that this synthetic activity performed by the *barzakh* is of a paradoxical nature. As differentiator between two things the *barzakh* must be a third thing, which is separated from them both. However, as a provider for their unity it must also be related to both things.¹⁶

Titus Burckhardt is another scholar who comments on the twin nature of the *barzakh*. The *barzakh* as seen “from the outside” has the necessarily definite meaning of partition or separate element. However, he argues there must be something more to it if one is to apply the “principle of non-otherness.” Burckhardt continues by saying that considering the *barzakh*’s ontological situation, it appears as a straightforward partition only from the point of view of looking at it “from the outside,” whereas, when seen “from above” it is the actual mediator between the two elements. “The *barzakh* is thus separation only in that it is itself the starting point of a separative perspective, in the eyes of which it appears to be a limit.” Later in the article Burckhardt again comments on this dual characteristic of the *barzakh*: “~~the~~ double function in a vertical sense of junction and separation, is expressed on the horizontal

¹⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 117-118, 204, 205.

¹⁶ Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship Between God and the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 11.

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plane by alternations of expansion and contraction. These are obviously further aspects of the same complementarism. Reduced to an elementary logical expression, these dualities can be represented respectively by affirmation and negation.”¹⁷ The *barzakh* functions as the isthmus between two opposing entities, but in that very function it also brings the two together and as such provides for their unity and thus, their limit.

It can be argued that the *barzakh*, when thought of in terms of a limit must, therefore, also exhibit the main characteristics of any limit, the limit as being a boundary, either in terms of a fixed beginning, or in terms of a fixed ending. For Ibn al-Arabi, however, the *barzakh* as limit is not only the essence of all things; it is where all things participate in as well.¹⁸ In *Impasse of the Angels*, Stefania Pandolfo explains that in Ibn al-Arabi's thought the concept of the *barzakh* summarises the condition of all existence, which in itself is understood as being-in-between. “The *barzakh* is both limit and an *entre-deux*, the *entre-deux* of the limit: something that stands between two things, both separating and joining them, combining the attributes of both.”¹⁹ As Ibn al-Arabi explains:

¹⁷ Titus Burckhardt, “Concerning the *Barzakh*,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* 13.1/2 (1979): 24-26.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5.17, 1022a, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), 770 define the limit as (1) the last point of each thing, i.e. the first point beyond which it is not possible to find any part, and the first point within which every part is; (2) the form, whatever it may be, of a spatial magnitude or of a thing that has magnitude; (3) the end of each thing (and of this nature is that towards which the movement and action are, not that from which they are—though sometimes it is both, that from which and that to which movement is, i.e. the final cause); (4) the substance of each thing, and the essence of each; for this is the limit of knowledge; and if of knowledge, of the object also. Evidently, therefore, “limit” has as many senses as “beginning,” and yet more; for the beginning is a limit, but not every limit is a beginning.

¹⁹ Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 188. Italics in original text.

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So the reality of the *barzakh* is that within it there be no *barzakh*. It is that which meets what is between the two by its very essence. If it were to meet one of the two with a face that is other than the face with which it meets the other, then there would have to be within itself, between its two faces, a *barzakh* that differentiates between the two faces so that the two do not meet together. If there is no such *barzakh*, then the face with which it meets one of the two affairs between which it stands is identical with the face with which it meets the other. This is the true *barzakh*. It is, through its own essence, identical with everything it meets. Hence the separation between the things and the separating factor become manifest as one in entity. Once you come to know this, you have come to know what *barzakh* is. (III 518.1)²⁰

A false conception of the limit, as duality, will preclude it from fulfilling its very function, as a unifying principle to a known duality. In Ibn al-Arabi's words:

Hence, the "one" is the true *barzakh*. Anything that can be divided is not one. The one divides but it is not divided, which is to say that it is not divisible in itself. After all if it receives division in its entity, then it is not the one. If it is not the one, then it is not the counterpart of each of the two things between which it stands through its essence. But in such a situation the one is known to be one, without a doubt. The *barzakh* is known but not perceived, rationally understood but not witnessed. (III 518. 1)²¹

Salman Bashier claims that Ibn al-Arabi's definition for the *barzakh* is a tentative one as the *barzakh* is the essential factor that makes the activity of defining possible. The way to understanding the definition of the *barzakh* is to understand the essence of the activity of defining, which is the act of differentiating between things. It is to understand that defining, the separation between things, and that which defines, the separating factor, become

²⁰ William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 335. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 204.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 335

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discernible as one in unity. In addition it is to recognise that the root of all things is differentiation, because it is through a process of differentiation that limits are set. Without these limits no knowledge would be possible. Ibn al-Arabī explains as follows:

For distinction occurs through limits, and knowledge comes to be through distinction. Were it not for the separating factor, no entity would become distinct from any other entity, and there would be no knowledge of anything whatsoever. (IV 145. 27)²²

If you desire to bring near to yourself the conceptualization of what I have said, consider the essential limits of the limited things through which alone the limited thing can be rationally understood and without which the known object would be nonexistent [as known object]. (III 397. 3)²³

Intrinsic to this activity of defining, which is differentiating one thing from another, is the existence of a paradoxical aspect. It is paradoxical because something is defined through the means of separating it from all relations with the Other. However, in this separation difference itself becomes the most unifying of relations.

The closest, most affectionate, and most unifying relations is one between Other (*khilāf*) and its other, from which it is differentiated. . . . Each desires and wishes that it can become one with its other for the sake of avoiding any difference between itself and Other, so that witnessing becomes only for the one and that the other disappears in it. (III 269. 26)²⁴

²² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁴ Bashier, *Ibn al-Arabī's Barzakh*, 88.

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According to Ibn al-Arabī, something defines itself by means of a process of differentiating itself from all relations to the Other. Though, by differentiating itself from the Other, it relates itself to the Other. To avoid this paradoxical situation it seeks to differentiate itself from all relations to the Other, including the relation of difference, by making the Other disappear into it. This can only happen when something unites with the Other and as such completely loses itself in the Other. By identifying themselves things lose their very identity, for in the process they become other than themselves. Bashier sums it up as things ceasing to be in the very moment they come to be, or that the existence of things is the same as their nonexistence.²⁵

The *barzakh*, as limit, facilitates the act of defining through a paradoxical relationship between existence and nonexistence. For Ibn al-Arabī it is not a question of either existence or nonexistence, but an acceptance of the fact that things are both real and not-real. He claims that:

The *Barzakh* is like the dividing line between existence and nonexistence. It is neither existent nor nonexistent. If you attribute it to existence, you will find a whiff of existence within it, since it is immutable. But if you attribute it to nonexistence, you will speak the truth, since it has no existence. (III 46. 27, 47.25)²⁶

To explain this contradictory characteristic of the *barzakh*, Ibn al-Arabī frequently employs the mirror as analogy.

For example, a person perceives his form in a mirror. He knows for certain that he has perceived his form in one respect and he knows for certain he has not perceived his form in another respect. . . . He cannot

²⁵ Bashier, *Ibn al-Arabī's Barzakh*, 88.

²⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 205.

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deny that he has seen his form, and he knows that his form is not in the mirror, nor is it between himself and the mirror. . . . Hence he is neither a truth teller nor a liar in his words, I saw my form, I did not see my form.' (I 304. 16)²⁷

From what we have learned so far it becomes clear that Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* has ontological status, as undivided unity, as —third known thing” and it stands in relation between two other entities.²⁸ The *barzakh* also has epistemological value as no knowledge would be possible without its ability to differentiate and define. The unity of this knowledge is based on the ambiguous representation of the limit. The reality of the *barzakh* brings the real and unreal together while keeping them apart. The *barzakh* depicts reality not in terms of mere separation or empty unification but in terms of difference through unity. There is a transcendent feature to this representation. Knowledge of the *barzakh* does not only imply knowledge of the limits of human thought by means of rational reflection on these limits, it is to know the limits of human thought, to realise them, and in that moment of realization to transcend them.²⁹ In transcending the limits of rational thought, rational thought is not merely left behind, but rather, this transition gives rise to new, creative and imaginative thinking, the rational and the imaginative coming together in order to establish new modes of being-in-the world.

Up to now I have looked at Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* in terms of a limit that gives existence to things by being in relation to them. In Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts the limit is a locus for gathering opposites by which it facilitates an

²⁷ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 118.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 118, 205.

²⁹ Bashier, *Ibn al-Arabi's Barzakh*, 18.

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understanding of real and unreal, existence and nonexistence, instead of conceptions of either one or the other. In this function the limit also has an aspect of transcendence, a movement beyond the conceptual limits set by rational reflection.

Ibn al-Arabī's *barzakh* proposes an innovative understanding of space. In spatial terms the limit becomes a third intermediary space where an encounter between opposites takes place.

When neither of two adjacent substances can be divided rationally or in sensation, there is no escape from a *barzakh* between the two. The adjacency of the two substances is the adjacency of their spatial confines. Between these confines there is no third confine without a substance. Between the two confines and the two substances there is an intelligible *barzakh*, without doubt which prevents each substance from being identical with the other and each confines to being identical with the other. Thus this *barzakh* is the counterpart of each substance and each confine through its own essence. (III 518.1)³⁰

The *barzakh*, as limit, can be understood in terms of a threshold, a place which has special functions. The *barzakh* interacts simultaneously with inside and outside and one can argue that in its spatial interconnection with the two sites the *barzakh* becomes liminal. Etymologically liminal is derived from the Latin *limen* which means threshold, the level at which something happens, or the point at which something begins or changes, also boundary and limit.³¹ Boundaries and threshold spaces demarcate one thing from another. These

³⁰ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 335

³¹ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=limen> (accessed June 08, 2011).

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spaces are important agencies of relational ordering as they give things, or spaces, an identity which is defined in relation to the Other.³²

As my interest in this project lies with gardens, I will conclude these thoughts on the *barzakh* by highlighting another of Ibn al-Arabi's analogies for the *barzakh*, the courtyard. Courtyard, as liminal site *per exemplar*, becomes in Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts one of the most encompassing figures to capture the essence of the *barzakh*. In the *Futūhāt* he devoted a poem to this effect and it is worthwhile to highlight some parts here in full.

The *barzakh* is between-between,
a station between this and that,
not one of them, but the totality of the two.

It is the shadow between the lights and the darknesses,
the separating limit between *wujūd* and nonexistence,
and at it the near path comes to an end.

The *barzakh* brings together the two sides
and is the courtyard between the two knowledges.

To it belongs what lies between the center point and circumference.

It is neither compound nor noncompound. (IV 337.29)³³

The importance of the courtyard, as threshold space, is also highlighted by Ebrahim Moosa in his discussion of a poetics of imagination in the thoughts of Al Ghazali. Highlighting Al Ghazali's phrase, —~~And~~ what ever precedes it is liker a threshold/ antechamber/ vestibule [*diblīz*] for the seeker of it [God],” Moosa explains that the Persian word *diblīz* has been Arabized and means

³² Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), 64.

³³ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 333, 334.

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the space between the door and the house. A *diblīz*-ian space, according to Moosa, is a liminal space signifying not only the space between two entities, but also signifying a space of action. Within this space there is always an entry from the outside and an entry into the inside. Thus, this threshold space functions as a critical intermediary space between inside and outside or the hidden and the exposed. Although it is a bounded space between door and house, it is never a worthless space for it offers a multitude of views and insights. Standing between door and street this space can either be viewed from the house itself, which places it on the outside, or from the street, thus making the space part of the inside of the house. Moosa explains that the most important dimension of the *diblīz* is the fact that it is neither door nor house, but also simultaneously both and as metaphor captures an imaginative space which opens itself up for interaction and experience. As such the *diblīz* is a —mobile force field,” which lends itself to —nontotalitarian modes of being and thought.”³⁴ Moosa’s reflection on the in-betweenness of the *diblīz* highlights the essential qualities of the courtyard, not only in terms of its physical and structural layout, but also in terms of its possibilities as an alternative and imaginative tool to theorise about space.

The *barzakh* can be thought of in terms of the spatial topography of a courtyard. The courtyard stands between inside and outside; it is neither the one nor the other, but simultaneously both. These gardens reflect a profound sense of place, their openness to the sky is emphasised by their surrounding walls and buildings. Here the view is drawn inwards, usually to a central

³⁴ Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and The Poetics of Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39, 47-49.

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fountain, and upwards to the openness of the sky. Highlighted within these gardens are the play between shadow and light. As garden spaces, they are constantly changing and in flux, overseen by seasons and weather. As such, courtyard gardens become a microcosm of the greater macrocosm.

Drawing from Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka's discussion on the interplay between the visible and invisible in sensory perception, I argue that the courtyard, as focus of sensory perception, also involves a play between the visible and invisible. According to Tymieniecka, sensory perception is a primordial constitution of Being and part of life. Sensory perception, she argues, is a constructive interplay between the visible and invisible sides of physical objects, which at some moments seem to partly pass into each other. It is, moreover, only through this interplay that an object can be grasped. Apprehension is an intuitive intellectual act, leaving both sides behind while simultaneously forming from them an intellectual structure of the encountered object. It becomes clear that in this process, where the two realms partly pass into each other, the visible into the invisible, the two opposites not only call for each other, but in a certain sense are determined as a function of each other. It is in this act of coming together that we encounter Being as both absence-in-presence and presence-in-absence. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

Every visual something, as individual as it is, functions also as a dimension, because it gives itself as the result of a dehiscence of Being. What this ultimately means is that the proper essence [*le proper*] of the

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visible is to have a layer [*doublure*] of invisibility in the strict sense, which makes it present as a certain absence.³⁵

As I will argue, this paradox or double movement between absence and presence is the courtyard's most distinctive quality, and it is also the fundamental nature of the *barzakh*. The *barzakh* acts as a courtyard as it is an in-between space where external and internal realities meet to facilitate new understandings of reality.

Concluding her discussion on perception, Tymieniecka claims that it is foremost imagination, together with the intellectual faculties, that constitute our understanding of the world. She writes that:

Imagination projects the bridges, the significant links, the discrete continuity between the traces left by memory for retrieval, but in doing so it projects a radius half in light and half progressively receding into shadows, unclear and indistinct. Its images expand our psychic universe, mingling with realities in a fullness with innumerable dimensions, the felt horizon of our existence. The human creative process brings all the human faculties into a vertiginous game in which the visible and invisible meet in all the modalities of their mutual exchange.³⁶

Although Merleau-Ponty was commenting on the art of painting, I believe his comments on the imaginary add to Tymieniecka's insights and more specifically to my discussion of the *barzakh*. According to Merleau-Ponty, thinking of something in terms of an image has acquired a negative connotation as it is, then, believed to be only a copy or second-thing.

³⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, trans. Carleton Dallery and ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 187.

³⁶ Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, "The Visible and Invisible in the Dynamic Manifestation of Life," in *The Visible and the Invisible in the Interplay between Philosophy, Literature and Reality*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 5.

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However, it is nothing as such, but on the other-hand, nor does the thing belong only to the –in-itself” The thing or image are the –inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling [*le sentir*] makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and imminent visibility which make up the whole problem of the imaginary.”³⁷

The imaginary is simultaneously nearer and much further away from the actual. It is nearer because it is part of the mental makeup of the body in constituting the actual or real and farther because it is a –likeness only according to the body; because it does not offer the mind an occasion to rethink the constitutive relations of things, but rather it offers the gaze traces of vision, from the inside, in order that it may espouse them; it gives vision that which clothes it within, the imaginary texture of the real.” For Merleau-Ponty this could mean the existence of an –inner gaze,” a third eye, which I would argue is the recognition of the quality of the *barzakh*.³⁸

Both, Tymieniecka and Merleau-Ponty, engage the imaginative and the real in mapping an encounter that brings together two opposites in order to make something visible. For Deleuze this coming together is also the very function of a map, which he explains through his discussion of the Australian Aborigines’ map of dream voyages and landscape.

At the limit, the imaginary is a virtual image that is interfused with the real object, and vice versa, thereby constituting a crystal of the unconscious. It is not enough for the real object or the real landscape to evoke similar or related images; it must disengage its *own* virtual image at the same time the latter, as an imaginary landscape,

³⁷ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 164.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

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makes its entry into the real, following a circuit where each of the two terms pursues the other, is interchanged with the other. 'Vision' is the product of the doubling or splinting in two [*doublement ou dédoublement*], this coalescence.³⁹

It is, then, from this perspective that I argue that most courtyard gardens, and certainly the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, map a space that is, at one and the same time, filled with presence and representation. Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit write that the courtyard "represents a completeness" as from it an accumulation of meanings can emerge. On the one hand the garden functions as the "mirror of the soul," of a person, the cosmos and of paradise. On the other only by means of a physical encounter of the gardens itself, can a person become aware of the "palpable presence and solidity of the surrounding walls," the "directly visible presence of the limitless sky" and the "palpable presence of water."⁴⁰ The courtyard is a physical space, but also a space shaped by the imagination. Imagination, which, according to Ibn al-Arabī, is, in itself, fundamentally an intermediate reality, intrinsically ambiguous, neither the one nor the other, but also both. It is first and foremost a *barzakh*.

The knowledge of the imagination and of its contiguous and discontiguous worlds is a magnificent pillar among the pillars of true knowledge. It is the knowledge of the *barzakh*. (II 309. 13)⁴¹

³⁹ Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 63.

⁴⁰ Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, eds., *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999), 16, 23, 25, 36, 247. See Chapter Three, where the architectural features of the courtyard garden are discussed at great length to draw the parallels between architecture, imagination and *barzakh*.

⁴¹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 333.

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It becomes clear that one of the main characteristics of the *barzakh* is that it makes possible the understanding of —“definition” and —“imitation” as the root of all existence, recognizing that nothing can be itself by itself, but that everything is defined in relation to the Other. The *barzakh*, as the space betwixt and between, facilitates this separation and in the process the *barzakh* leads to the attainment of creative and imaginative knowledge. In effect, as William Chittick writes, Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* is —an in-betweenness . . . each thing is an isthmus between other things, both spatially and temporally. In the same way everything is ‘imagination’ or ‘image’ (*khayāl*).”⁴²

These thoughts are echoed by Stefania Pandolfo when she affirms that the —intermediate world of the *barzakh* in Ibn al-Arabi's cosmological topology: [is] the region of the boundary and domain of the Imagination, in which contraries come together, bodies are spiritualised and spirits become manifest in corporeal forms.”⁴³ The *barzakh* is the boundary, the limit and the threshold; it creates anew every time it meets something with two faces that are one.

Understanding the role of the *barzakh* as the disrupter of binarism, we can answer Edward Soja's call for an ontological, epistemological and theoretical

⁴² William C. Chittick, —The In-Between Reflections on the Soul in the Teachings of Ibn Arabi,” In *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 32. Important to note here is that in Ibn al-Arabi's point of view imagination, itself, has ontological status. On Ibn al-Arabi's world of the imagination. See Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

⁴³ Pandolfo, *Impasse of Angels*, 188. Italics in original text.

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rebalancing of spatiality. The *barzakh*, within spatial thinking, is Soja's Thirdspace:

the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to us all yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an unimaginable universe.⁴⁴

Perhaps, in a sense, this Thirdspace is also the third eye Merleau-Ponty referred to. The space of the *barzakh* unveils for us the world of the painter. It opens our eyes to the —play of shadows” by which we —see things and a space.” However, to see it fully it is also necessary —not to see the play of shadows and light around it” as only in hiding can they make something visible. —The visible in the profane sense forgets its premises; it rests upon a total visibility which is to be re-created and which liberates the phantoms captive in it.”⁴⁵ It is through the *barzakh* that we can open ourselves up to a special kind of seeing in which the visible and the invisible are unveiled. The *barzakh*, understood as such, is a —continued birth.”⁴⁶

Up to now I have taken Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* and placed it within a dialogue that focuses on the importance of the intermediate quality of an ontological Thirdspace. This has been a necessary theoretical undertaking for laying the groundwork for my argument that the gardens of the Alhambra are simultaneously real and unreal, capable of juxtaposing several different mental and imagined itineraries.

⁴⁴ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 56.

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 166, 167.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

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HETEROTOPIA

By developing the concept of the *barzakh* I am aiming to direct attention to an alternative epistemology, an epistemology that does not focus on the dualism of a subject separated from the world of objects and which, through that separation, assumes a controlling and dominating position. In fact, as the above arguments have shown, the space of the *barzakh* opens up a world, which, on the one hand, presents itself to a person in an experience of perception and to which, on the other hand, such a person brings her/his memories, thoughts and ideas. The *barzakh*, in these terms, is equivalent to Merleau-Ponty's topological space, —*amiliieu* in which are circumscribed relations of proximity, of envelopment. . . . It is encountered not only at the level of the physical, world, but again it is constitutive of life."⁴⁷ It is an epistemology that foregrounds the relationship of two different modes of being-in-the-world linked together; an epistemology, which I believe, that recognises the importance of both an inner and outer horizon to a person's situatedness. This, in short, is the space of the —*in-between*," which is simultaneously place and non-place, real and not real, not unlike the space of the *barzakh*, whose contradictory nature was exemplified in Ibn al-Arabi's analogy of the mirror.

If I want to argue that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra can be considered an in-between space, I have to consider these gardens as examples of an alternative mode of ordering, thus in fact a heterotopia. The

⁴⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 210, 211.

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word *heterotopia* is an amalgamation of two Greek words, *topos*, meaning place and *heteros* meaning other or different. Originally a medical term, it is used to indicate the displacement or misplacement of parts. Michel Foucault appropriated this term and introduced it into the social sciences as spaces of alternate ordering, a social ordering that is different from that which surrounds it and therefore is set apart from the rest. This alternate ordering effectively denotes these spaces as Other and as such it became a catchphrase in the theorizing of space focussed on marginality, transgression, conflict and acts of resistance.⁴⁸

Although Foucault's heterotopia has over the years received a great deal of significant attention, mostly by focussing on it as a socially constructed counter-site of resistance against the dominant order, my understanding of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, as heterotopian spaces, challenges

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27. See also Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997), viii, 41 for his discussion of Foucault's six principles of heterotopias. Hetherington defines heterotopias as sites of alternate ordering and places of Otherness, an Otherness which is established by their incongruous condition. He continues by explaining that their incongruity materialises through a relationship of difference with other sites, in that their presence either causes an unsettling of spatial relations or an alternative version of spatial relations.

Worthy of note is Edward W. Soja's discussion of Foucault's heterotopia in "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA" in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 13-34. He focuses on Foucault's heterotopia as a way of discovering and finding meaning in the hidden, but often revealing Other within human geography. Benjamin Genocchio in "Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces" in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 35-46, highlights a problem inherent in Foucault's defined heterotopias. After pointing out Foucault's dissimilar use of the term in "Other Spaces" and in *The Order of Things*, he presents the reader with a distinct explanation of both usages. He then poses the question how these heterotopias can be simultaneously "outside" or "different" from all other spaces, while also existing "within" the social order. He concludes that heterotopia is more an idea about space than any actual place. "It is an idea that insists that the ordering of spatial systems is subjective and arbitrary in that we know nothing of the initial totality that it must presuppose. It is an idea which consequently produces/theorises space as transient, contestory, plagued by lapses and ruptured sites," 43.

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these preconceptions of heterotopia, even though it finds resonance in Foucault's own analogy of the mirror as a mixed joint experience between heterotopia and utopia.⁴⁹

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent; such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me; from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect; it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.⁵⁰

Foucault's mirror is a placeless, virtual and unreal place in which I see myself although I know that I am not physically there. It is simultaneously also very real, as a neutralizing space it shows me my absence from the place where I am, but it reflects my gaze back to myself where I physically am. In both Ibn al-Arabi's and Foucault's analogies the mirror is a concrete, yet virtual

⁴⁹ Utopia in this sense is not only understood as an imaginary perfect or ideal society, but emphasis is rather on a good place, taken from the obsolete word *Eutopia*, from the Greek *eús* good (adj.) For Socrates in Plato's *Philebus* the good is also beauty, symmetry and truth. Literally Utopia means no place, from Greek *ou*; not and *topos*: a place *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, <http://dictionary.reference.com> (accessed July 05, 2011).

⁵⁰ Foucault, "Other Spaces," 24.

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meeting ground, which functions as an intermediary space between object and subject.

Heterotopia signifies a liminal, in-between and intermediary space between object and subject. Yet, both mirror analogies engages the subject, “I,” in terms of her/his position in space, whereby perception becomes a spatial affair and the mirror the scene whereby identity is continuously negotiated. Commenting on Foucault’s mirror analogy, Giuliana Bruno points us towards a haptic understanding of this topos. The mirror, set between utopia and heterotopia, is a joint mixed experience and becomes a site of self-representation and a space of constant displacements. She explains:

A placeless place,‘ the mirror is a site without a geography that enables one to locate oneself via a series of displacements. A mirror makes it apparent that the eye has a location, is positioned in the body. Because of this positioning‘ and the orientation of our gaze, we are unable to see ourselves other than as reflection. To thrust a self-analytic gaze upon itself, the body needs a place. The mirror-screen thus becomes the site of the subject’s own visibility and self-projection, a dwelling place of the self in virtual space. As a vehicle of self-exploration, the mirror—a filmic site—is the starting point of a spatiovisual diary, for it houses the tours and detours of identity.⁵¹

Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, heterotopia is placed not within the grand narratives of resistance, marginality or transgression, but as an in-between space, a threshold space where, on the one hand, the Other is both encountered and defined and on the other hand, the self is fashioned by means of a haptic reading of the spatial topography.

⁵¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 113, 114.

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In the heterotopic space of the courtyard gardens the contradiction between that which is real and that which is not, is in the words of Merleau-Ponty, —~~the~~ contradiction between the omnipresence of consciousness and its involvement in a field of presence.”⁵² These gardens present us with a visual *barzakh*. They become the mirror whereby a person is not only present to her/his surroundings, but at the same time transcending these surroundings in thought and imagination.

THE NEUTRAL

The space of the mirror, or the *barzakh*, is also the space where Louis Marin’s notion of the neutral comes into play. In *Utopics*, Louis Marin introduces the concept of the neutral following a deconstructive reading of Thomas More’s *Utopia*. He focuses on the tension that exists within the play of difference between *ou* meaning no-place and *eu* meaning good place, contained by More’s Utopia. This unbridgeable no-space is the space of the neutral, a word derived from *ne-uter*, meaning neither one nor the other.⁵³ Marin, quoting Ernst Bloch’s *The Rococo of Fate*, states that the neutral is —~~the~~ *threshold* limiting the inner and the outer; the place where exit and enter reverse and are fixed in this reversal; it is the same for all limits, provided by the thought of the limit: contradiction itself.”⁵⁴

⁵² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 386.

⁵³ Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (New York: Humanity Books, 1984). See also Marin’s definitions and philosophical analysis of the Neutral, p. 12-28.

⁵⁴ Marin, *Utopics*, xix. An English translation of *The Rococo of Fate* can be found in Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 39-42.

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For Marin, the neutral is the gap between true and false, it is the third term that opens up a space where contraries are both denied and conserved. Marin claims that the notion of the neutral –aims at any fracture of totality through the contradiction that places the parts of the totality at a distance from themselves: at the contradiction or the differentiation productive of difference.”⁵⁵ The neutral, in this sense, becomes the figure of a contradictory space, situated between opposites, but in essence opening up a new mediating space where these opposites come together. In fact, to argue that the courtyard gardens can become part of the utopics of the neutral, it is important to note that the space of the neutral, as contradictory space, has a similar function as the space occupied by the mirror. It is a figurative space which, at one and the same time, displaces a subject in space and situates the subject in time and space. As space the neutral can be defined as being in a:

Relationship of dynamic totality whose parts are *in opposition, in a position of marked difference*. The nature of this relationship, however, would exclude it from this totality, *in a position of difference with respect to the internal difference of the totality*. The neutral thus creates the paradoxical idea of a part of a whole, but outside of the whole, of a part that would be a supplement to the complementary parts of the totality whose sum it exhausts.⁵⁶

See also Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 148.

⁵⁵ Marin, *On Representation*, 147.

⁵⁶ Marin, *Utopics*, 14, 15. Marin, *On Representation*, 147. This definition of the Neutral reminds of Hegel's *aufhebung* or sublation, which William Desmond, *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 95, describes as the position in which something is negated or conceived, that in the process of cancelling that something, it is also transcended, however in the act of transcending it, what is cancelled is also preserved and contained as the necessary condition of the transcending move. Thus, there are three dimensions to *aufhebung*: negation, transcendence and

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Furthermore, the neutral is that which allows movement from one contrary to another; its function is to serve as the mediator between the two contraries. However, it becomes mediator only because of the fact that its nature would not allow it to be either the one or the other.

If the neutral term functions logically as the instrument of conjunction for contraries, it is from and around it that the contraries find an equilibrium in their contrariety. As its organizing principle it is the center of the structure and the rule for its coherence. It allows for the elements inside the whole system to be substituted. The term designates the process at the very same time it comes into being between the contraries. It ontologizes this duration in the synchrony of an opposition it henceforth masters and orders.⁵⁷

And finally the neutral will constitute:

The principle of the conjunction of contraries; it will join them in their very opposition. While being the mark of their opposition, tying them together and dominating them, it is the very contraries of contraries. It allows each of them to be contraries and at the same time escapes from this relation that founds them.⁵⁸

However, most importantly, Marin attributes a spatial quality to the neutral, for he argues that the neutral —~~the~~ers between yes and no: there is an unoccupiable place that the neutral occupies.”⁵⁹

preservation. Difference is interpreted dialectically and opposites are held together in dialectical unity. The emphasis of *aufhebung*, then, is that in embracing the unity of opposites, something is both preserved and changed in the dialectical interplay. However, in *Utopics*, 20, Marin states that —the neutral cannot be taken in the sense of the synthesis by Hegelian *Aufhebung*, on the contrary, of the reciprocal distancing of one from the other: this is the productive operation of the limit, a differentiation between complementary elements of a whole.”

⁵⁷ Marin, *Utopics*, 14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

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I propose that the neutral, as gap or as boundary, shares in the characteristics of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*. Both can be defined in terms of a limit that is irrevocably paradoxical, simultaneously inside and outside of the totality. As third thing they have ontological status, which is granted to them because of their relational bond with that between which they stand.

It is, however, Marin's article, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," that encapsulates, for me, the essence of the neutral in terms of a space that brings together and separates at the same time.⁶⁰ Showing the reader two photographs of Sears Tower (Willis Tower) in Chicago, one leading the gaze to its visual limit, the spatial frontier of the horizon, the other showing the tower as central point for the eye's gaze, as an extraordinary presence, Marin poses the following question: "Is it possible that we can consider these two visions of the world, not by means of separating the opposing terms of relation, but by seeing them together, at the same time and at the same moment by locating one term into its opposite?" For Marin, the tension found in Utopia becomes exemplified by the two images of the towers; it is a tension between frontier and horizon, closure and liberty, totality and infinity, limit and transcendence.⁶¹ Within this space of the gap, there is a no-man's land, and it is here that Marin positions the neutral.

A notion I will call a *neutral* place, a locus whose characteristics are semiotically negative, whose specificity consists in being neither the one nor the other, neither this edge nor the other. . . . This is the merging

⁶⁰ Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," *Critical Inquiry* 19.3 (1993): 397-420.

⁶¹ Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia," 402, 406. See also his explanation of the change in signification of the term horizon, which originally meant limit, the end of the gaze, to that which is now immense or infinite, the limitless horizon. He points out that the horizon became infinite at the very moment Thomas More's Utopia became a noun. 408.

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place of Utopia, a neutral place . . . the interval of frontiers and limits by way of a horizon that closes a site and opens up a space.⁶²

Marin argues that Thomas More's *Utopia* is paradoxical in its very essence, for the term *outopia* negates with its name the very place it is naming. Furthermore, translating the Greek term will show that it does not mean that this is an imaginary place, a place that does not exist, but rather that it, as place name, —designates a no-place; it designates *another* referent, the other of any place." Utopia is what creates that otherness and it is in that sense that it becomes the name of the —neutral." It is a liminal space, limited and limitless, for in Marin's words:

Utopia is a figure of the limit and of the distance, the drifting of frontiers with the gap between two opposite terms, neither this nor that one. Utopia is the figure of the horizon.⁶³

Important to point out here, especially since it also plays a role in understanding that the gardens of the Alhambra are neutral spaces, is that for Marin, utopia is the discourse of the neutral.⁶⁴ As mentioned before, the figure of the neutral gives voice to a figurative space existing between contradictions. In Marin's viewpoint, this voice becomes part of the discourse whereby a utopian outlook, concerning society and self, is projected upon the geography, or topography of specific places. These places become invested,

⁶² Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia," 410, 411. After, a —semantic journey" on the etymological origin and path of the word limit, Marin qualifies the limit both as a way and a gap. The limit functions as a threshold to a space beyond, a bridge between the visible and the invisible.

⁶³ Ibid., 412.

⁶⁴ See Marin, *Utopics*, 195-200, for a discussion on Ideology and Utopia where he proposes that Utopia is the ideological critique of ideology. This critique takes the form of a —nonconceptual fictional totality." It becomes a discourse that disrupts reality by means of a figurative representation that constitutes utopia. Utopia is, thus, a fictional construction that refers to that which is not part of that reality, therefore, it —doesn't *signify* reality, but rather *indicates* it discursively."

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through spatial practice, with values and motifs in terms of what Marin then calls an utopics. In effect, these discourses involve a spatial play whereby certain spaces do not only represent certain ideas, but also express those meanings and ideas in their topography. Marin argues that when thinking of utopia in spatial terms, it is, in actuality, thinking of a space in terms of the paradoxical characteristics of the limit, for on the one hand these spaces are existent spaces defined by social practice and on the other hand they present us with imaginative and unlimited encounters and experiences that open up new spaces, real and unreal.

When we think of utopia in terms of space, it could be said that we are thinking of its essential nature imaginatively, its present. . . . Its map whose viewpoint is everywhere and nowhere sketched out by an observer everywhere present, nearby and far off, simultaneously here and there, may perhaps provide a sign that will indicate this unique point of conjunction between time and space, the *now* that is *here*. . . . What then is this utopic now? It is an instant of difference and indifference of what is permanent. The neutral limit, here to be thought of temporarily, moves from one to the other.⁶⁵

The idea of neutral spaces and utopia is also commented on by a compatriot of Marin, the Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre. He introduces three concepts into his vocabulary to define urban space: isotopy, heterotopy and utopia. Isotopy is the all-surrounding space that makes a place the same place, e.g. a neighbourhood. But, alongside this sameness (the neighbourhood), there is a different place, an other place, which is made different by its heterotopy, whereby it situates itself in respect to the first

⁶⁵ Marin, *Utopics*, xxiii-xxiv.

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place. It is a difference that can vary from a complete contrast between places, all the way up to places being in a conflicting relationship to one another. These relationships should always be understood dynamically as these places never stand in isolation, but always stand in relation to one another. Lefebvre, however, points out that between these places there exist a neutral element, which is found at the conjunctions of the juxtaposed places, such as a street, square or garden.⁶⁶

In addition to these physical places, according to Lefebvre, there is also an elsewhere, a no-where, the non-place, that which has no place and seeks a place of its own. He states that a height erected anywhere on a vertical plane can become a dimension of —elsewhereness, a place characterised by presence-absence: of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional, half-real, sublime thought.” In addition then, this *u-topic* is very real, the very heart of the real, since in urban space elsewhere is everywhere and nowhere. It is a paradoxical space where paradox becomes the contrary of the everyday.

This is utopia (real, concrete). The result is the transcendence of the closed and the open, the immediate and the mediate, near and far orders, within a differential reality in which these terms are no longer separated, but become immanent differences.⁶⁷

Most importantly, however, is Lefebvre’s claim that this, *u-topic*, can appear incorporated in those neutral spaces such as gardens and parks. These

⁶⁶ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 38, 39, 128, 131. For Lefebvre, these neutral spaces are not an indication that there is nothing there, rather that they are indifferent, unlike Marin’s neutral which can never be indifferent. However, later Lefebvre claims that the indifference changes when it incorporates the non-place of utopia.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

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gardens and parks make the —elsewhere” visible, genuine and sensible. They are at once absolute nature and pure fact.⁶⁸

This point is also taken up by Kevin Hetherington, who claims that Marin’s concept of the neutral indicates a place that shares similarities not only to that of a limit, but is also simultaneously a site of limit-experiences found in utopian moments. The realm of the neutral is a realm of ordering as it becomes a space where difference is not only encountered, but also ordered. It is a space of alternate ordering, which makes it a heterotopia. Here heterotopias become places where ideas and practices of the good life come into being.⁶⁹

Utopia as a city or a landscape develops and displays a virtual or potential spatial order in its text, it offers to the beholder-reader an ambiguous representation, the equivocal image of significations contrary to the concept of limit: on the one hand the synthetic unity of the same and the other, of past and future, of this world and the beyond . . . and on the other hand the active tracing of differences, the indefinite fight between opposite forces.⁷⁰

Marin’s concept of the neutral, as a realm of relational ordering, a heterotopia, embodies characteristics similar to Ibn al-Arabi’s *barzakh*. It is a space —“twixt and between” and as such it can likewise be thought of as a liminal space. As limit it functions both as a gap and a way, hence, its liminality is not only found in its in-betweenness, but it in a certain sense it also indicates a passage, a movement from the “same” to the —other.” For Ibn al-Arabi, this very act of defining the other leads to its destruction, its

⁶⁸ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 131.

⁶⁹ Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, ix, 67.

⁷⁰ Marin, “Frontiers of Utopia,” 412.

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nonexistence, making it at one and the same time existent or nonexistent. Marin, on the other hand, calls this process the war of difference and the neutral the mark of both contraries' destruction.

If the synthesis of contraries is one and the other, both denied and conserved, the neutral would mark out its empty place, waiting to be filled. Neither one nor the other, waiting to be one *and* the other, it has the power (for it is no longer simply passage from one to the other) to allow both the figure of their superior unity and mastery. . . . It creates their reciprocal negation by giving it the power of death.⁷¹

Concurring with Hetherington, who claims that the principles of relational ordering give space its distinctiveness in relation to its other, I believe that the idea of the neutral explains a third space, a heterotopic space, and a *barzakh*. These spaces qualify as boundary, or threshold spaces, demarcating one thing from another, which turn them into important agencies of knowledge production.⁷² As arbitrators between opposites, they become spaces of power, but also spaces of possibilities and in both Ibn al-Arabi's and Marin's views, spaces of the imagination.

Furthermore, similar to the *barzakh*, the neutral also provides knowledge, for as stated before, the *barzakh*, as defining limit, functions as the bridge between true and false. This figure of the limit, the neutral, which denotes the in-between, while allowing the other in, is pure contradiction and as such it does not allow any negation or affirmation of the "Other" to be asserted as true or false.⁷³ It becomes the terrain where new knowledge is produced by

⁷¹ Marin, *Utopics*, 16.

⁷² Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity*, 67.

⁷³ Marin, *Utopics*, xxii, 7.

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means of an assimilation of opposites, while still retaining its own reality as well. The neutral, as can be argued of the *barzakh*, is —an other' place (neither one nor the other) but also the other' of place (nonplace, utopia)."⁷⁴

Bringing another point of view into the discussion, but still focussing on a utopian discourse, is Hugh Silverman. He argues that a utopian discourse (good place, which is also no-where) established itself in opposition to a dystopian discourse (a place of despair and unhappiness). In between them, in the here and now, one would find heterotopias. Silverman defines heterotopias as a multiplicity of different places, —~~every~~where" in the —~~here~~ and now." Silverman claims that identifying these models as utopian, dystopian or heterotopian, however, requires an interpretative topology. The study of place involves a topographic study of specific places, a study not limited to these places' history, but also involving the description of their features and ultimately an interpretation of their sign structures.⁷⁵

After deconstructing More's Utopia in a similar way to Marin, Silverman comes to the conclusion that utopia is an ideology in which the ideal good place is an idea, an universal truth, which a person can know by practicing a proper dialectic, something attainable, but not here, not now. Although modern versions of the teleology take different shapes, utopia will always

⁷⁴ Marin, *Utopics* 13.

⁷⁵ Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions: After Phenomenology and Structuralism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 326-337. I want to draw attention here to the fact that although Silverman situated utopia and dystopia on a vertical axis as opposites, dystopia is most often not understood as simply an opposite of utopia, but rather as a utopia that has gone wrong. See also Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) and Russell Jacoby *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Silverman also classifies heterotopias as either hypertopian (a de-generate utopia) or hypotopian (a se-generate dystopia).

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provide consolation, happiness and harmony and always involves the *telos* of a journey, where the individual has to move beyond the everyday present in order to attain it. Utopian discourse, thus, takes people outside themselves by offering them a picture of how their lives could be.

However, Silverman states, these fictions of a good place filled with happiness and harmony can become an epistemological and discursive reality, becoming sign systems that a person, in certain well-defined and well-crafted locations, can experience physically and interpretively. The special characteristics of these sites are generated and derived from either a utopian model (in my argument, the Alhambra gardens, as symbol of Paradise) or a dystopian model (Silverman gives Nazi Germany as an example). Sites can also be neutral, but even this neutrality can be sited in relation to utopia or dystopia. Silverman considers these sites as “*thit-texts*,” which entails that these topoi are mapped out in such a way that a person can walk through them in a predeterminable fashion, as well as in a certain amount of time. Even more, according to Silverman, while walking through these spaces, people are also, at the same time, living and creating them in their minds. These spaces, which we produce as we journey through them, are our reading, or interpretation, of specific recurrent themes, whether utopian or dystopian.

Important to my discussion of the gardens of the Alhambra is Silverman's contention that we are formed and reformed by our interpretations of these spaces. They become the structure of our interactions and the architecture of our knowledge. As a result, heterotopias can enrich the texts of our

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environment. These heterotopian texts are the metaphors of our context and found in, for example, our gardens, parks and other public spaces. Since they are the frameworks in which we find ourselves, they need to be read and interpreted.

Heterotopias are the places and discourses of the spaces which we occupy, the architecture of our knowledge, and the frames of our interaction. Hypertopia are the types of heterotopia which enrich the text of our city and country places. . . . Hypertopias are the metaphors of our contexts. A building well-designed, a garden nicely planned—a novel carefully crafted, a city thoughtfully organized—these are the hypertopias which we need to read, to interpret, to know and to re-create. A hypertopia is a place to live. . . . In hypertopias, the fictional, mythical and oneiric qualities of utopia are deconstructed, that is, given structure as a text that is already interpreted, already experienced in the heterotopian here and now A hypertopia is the delineation of a heterotopian place in which surplus of meaning is repeated everywhere and nowhere. Its topology may show its metaphorical features in certain places. . . . The inscribed traces of a knowledge production constitute the domain in which human interaction articulates an exquisite and artistic creativity without necessarily bearing the mark of any particular author.⁷⁶

It can be argued that Silverman's arguments open up a space that is inherently an in-between space. Situated at the juncture of different domains, these spaces, such as garden, parks, museums and monuments become liminal spaces people have to traverse, while paying attention to and interpreting their sign systems in order to get to know them and place them within their broader social environment. Heterotopias bear traces of Marin's neutral as they also acquire their determination from a utopian context, making them at once very real but also not real. It is a liminal space made

⁷⁶ Silverman, *Inscriptions*, 330, 331.

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visible. In effect, what Silverman describes is a production of space. In the words of Henri Lefebvre:

What is involved, therefore, is a *production*—the production of a space. Not merely the space of ideas, an ideal space, but a social and a mental space. An *emergence*. A decrypting of the space that went before.⁷⁷

Produced space, according to Lefebvre, implies a process of signification as it can be decoded and read. These codes are not general codes, but specific codes, which are established at specific historical periods, hence, known to those particular people. Produced space, as a result, has a dialectical character and it is part of the relationship and interaction between subjects, space and their surroundings, making space, as such, mental, physical and social.

However, my understanding of the neutral, in terms of Marin's use of the word in —Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present,” requires a slight shift of emphasis. It is clear that the terms, heterotopia and neutral, imply a discourse on space foregrounding an alternative epistemology of relational ordering. This discourse is focussed on the idea of an in-between space, a liminal space, which presents its agents with multiple meanings and possibilities. If I can be allowed a certain degree of flexibility, I believe that Marin, in his exposition of the neutral, not only opens up a space that can become part of a discourse on space, but, in effect, gives us a physical space that can engage its visitor in a haptic experience of perception in the here and now.

⁷⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 260.

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The experiential space of the neutral is, then, to return to Ibn al-Arabi and Foucault, the space of the mirror, a *barzakh*, where the focus now falls on recognising the contradictions and tracing the visual effects—the presence of light and shadow, of depth, or of movement and stasis. The neutral engages an observer in a dynamics of looking and interpretation.

CONCLUSION: MAPPING THE BARZAKH

In a recent collection on liminality, *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Space*, Bjørn Thomassen warns that in a postmodern and poststructuralist discourse liminality has taken a celebratory stance towards the interstitial. Liminal spaces have become attractive spaces, real, dreamed or imagined, to which one goes in order to break away from the normal. Liminal landscapes are found at the fringes, or at the limits. However, these liminal spaces are not peripheral spaces, but rather, in-between spaces, for their liminality implies the existence of a boundary line. According to Thomassen, the limits of these spaces are not simply there, but these limits need to be constantly confronted and through this confrontation these in-between spaces are given their own spatial reality.⁷⁸

Thomassen claims that the concept of liminality has experienced a revival, whereby the term is now used to talk about almost anything. Accordingly, any —“in-between and between” situation, or object, implies an understanding of

⁷⁸ Bjørn Thomassen, —“Visiting Liminality: The Danger of Empty Spaces,” in *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Space*, ed. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (New York: Routledge, 2012), 21. Thomassen gives seashores and beaches as examples of archetypal liminal landscapes. See also his classification of liminality under experiences of liminality, temporal dimension of liminality and spatial dimension of liminality.

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liminality relevant to its field, or even to some implications beyond its original use. Liminality is used in anthropology to indicate widespread notions of fluid or hybrid cultures. Liminality is also applied to analyse a diversity of minority cultures, such as trans-sexuality and transgender. Furthermore, minority groups are understood as occupying liminal socio-spatial positions.⁷⁹

Often in postmodern and postcolonial literatures and contemporary writing the strategy is to write from the in-between. The liminal has come to represent an “interstitial position between fixed identifications,” whereby liminality represents the possibility for a “cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.”⁸⁰ As a result, the general tendency is to positively place liminality as a vantage point from which to think, write and represent otherness and to articulate diversity.⁸¹

Finally, Thomassen concludes that liminality, today, is rather more an indication of liminal experiences or “rhinoid” moments, unfolding in the creativity and uncertainty of art, theatre, literature, leisure, and tourism. The liminal becomes a break from normality, a playful as-if experience whereby the key feature of liminality, that of transition, is lost. Within contemporary thought liminality has become characterised by an increasing ambivalent attitude. On the one hand there is the fear of liminal experiences as being truly personality transforming events and on the other hand a celebratory stance towards any kind of liminality.⁸² Most importantly, there is the danger

⁷⁹ Thomassen, “Revisiting Liminality,” 21-27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30.

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that in those empty-spaces, or non-spaces, the liminal becomes controlled and established as the normality.

Thomassen stresses the foregrounding of agency, which brings together thought and experience as answer to the problem of liminality only representing a chaotic and an unordered element of creativity. Liminal experiences, Thomassen explains, have a form and a recognizable pattern and even more, within any liminal experience a transition takes place, a movement from the self to nature and from nature to the self. Liminal experiences, as a consequence, allow for the recognition of the beauty and order of the natural world as being a condition for living and thinking sensibly. These liminal experiences place a person in tune with nature, with beauty and most importantly these experiences allow a person to see and recognise the extra-ordinary.⁸³

In this chapter I have examined the possibilities of mapping a space that has the ability to mediate between opposites such as real and unreal, existence and nonexistence and physical and mental, a space which is neither one nor the other, but simultaneously both. In essence this is a liminal space and I have found such a space in Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* and Louis Marin's neutral.

Along this specific route of mapping we have encountered ideas on the liminal, heterotopia and Thirdspace, but most importantly our path has taken us through Henri Lefebvre's production of space, whereby space becomes a network of intersections, but always —~~sees~~ an intermediary or mediating

⁸³ Thomassen, —~~Re~~visiting Liminality," 30-32.

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role: beyond each plane, beyond each opaque form, one seeks to apprehend something else.”⁸⁴

However, my mapping of the spatiality of the *barzakh* is more than just a mere tracing of the qualities of the *barzakh* in the theories of other in-between and relational spaces. Rather, by this mapping I have gathered together various theories and influences and in the process shifted the emphasis onto a haptic, experiential and imaginative encounter. It can be argued that the very idea behind the process of mapping suggests a bodily encounter, an encounter not only with the map in space, but also with the space of the map. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. . . . The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. . . . A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing which always come back to the same.’ The map has to do with performance.⁸⁵

The mapping of the *barzakh*, as a space both actual and virtual, is drawn on the surface of a mirror. The *barzakh* is all that is possible and it stands between Being and nothingness by its very essence. By this very position —~~Non~~-delimited nothingness stands before Non-delimited Being like a mirror.

⁸⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 183.

⁸⁵ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 1987), 13, 14.

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Within the mirror, Being sees its own form.” (III 46.27, 47.25)⁸⁶ Here the space of the *barzakh* assumes traits of the neutral as explained by Marin. The neutral is not only the arbitrator between two contradictory relationships, but it is a process, a production and a performance as it gives form and pattern to the Other in a movement that will bring not only knowledge of the Other, but also of the self.

Knowledge of the self is also mapped upon the double surface of the mirror in the construction of a haptic perception of the *barzakh*. A map which finally brings us back to Lefebvre who claims that:

We are confronted by a double surface, a double appearance which is governed by a single law and a single reality, that of reflection/refraction. The maximum difference is contained in every difference, even a minimal one. Every form belongs to the subject. It is the apprehension of the surface by the mirror.⁸⁷

According to Lefebvre, it is also this mirror that reveals the relationship between me and myself and between my body and the consciousness of my body. The mirror presents us with the ~~most~~ most unifying but also the most disjunctive relationship between form and content; forms therein have a powerful reality yet remain unreal; they readily expel or contain their contents, yet these contents retain an irreducible force.”⁸⁸ Finally, Lefebvre claims that the mirror is thus at once an object among others and an object different from all others, evanescent, fascinating. In and through the mirror, the traits of other objects in relationship to their spatial environment are

⁸⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 205.

⁸⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 185.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 185, 186.

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brought together; the mirror is an object in space, which speaks of space.”⁸⁹

The space of the *barzakh* can be considered in terms of the mirror of Lefebvre; it has irreducible force, not only as a space of the imagination, but also as a space of perception. It presents us with a map whereby a play of surfaces leads to the intersection between real and unreal. The *barzakh* is a map of the “in-between” and as a space — “in-between and between” it offers us alternative lenses to view and experience the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.

⁸⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 186.

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The Alhambra: Gardens of Light and Shadow

I am the garden appearing every morning with adorned beauty
Contemplate my beauty and you will be penetrated with [its]
understanding;¹

≈

[The garden] gives double satisfaction for the amount which
the judge of beauty imposed on it [as a fine].
For if the hand of the breeze fills it with [silver] dirhams of
light, he is satisfied by its [payment].
Yet [in surplus] the [gold] dinars of the sun fill the enclosure
of the garden filtering through its branches, leaving it embellished.
Moreover we do not know of any garden more pleasant
in its freshness, more fragrant in its surroundings, or sweeter
in the gatherings of its fruit.²

≈

All of art had offered me its beauty (*jamāl*),
giving me perfection (*kamāl*) and splendor (*bahā'*).
He who sees (*ra'ā*) me, imagines (ṭ-n-n) me at all hours,
giving what the water jug seeks [to get].
When my beholder ponders my beauty,
[his] visual perception causes [his] imagination (*khayyala*) to be
deceived (*a'kzaba*)
Since so diaphanous I am, that he sees the moon;
its halo happily settles in me.³

¹ A poem by Ibn Zamrak in the Hall of the Two Sisters, quoted by Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 144. See also his comments on the obstacles involved in establishing the exact text and translation of this poem, note 59, p. 222.

² From a poem by Ibn Zamrak adorning the walls of the Alhambra translated by James T. Monroe in *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 355 (87, 88, 89), 358 (92).

³ Poem edited and published by Emilio García Gómez, *Poemas árabes en los muros y fuentes de la Alhambra* (Madrid: Publicaciones del Instituto Egipcio de Estudios Islámicos, 1996), 105 quoted by Olga Bush, "When My Beholder Ponders:" Poetic Epigraphy in the Alhambra." *Pearls from Water. Rubies from Stone. Studies in Islamic Art in Honor of Priscilla Soucek*, ed. Linda Komaroff. *Artibus Asiae* 6.2 (2006): 55. ṭ-n-n is an Aramaic word meaning *zeal* or *envy*. Imagination translated into Arabic is *zānna*

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INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I argued for an alternative way of understanding certain spaces, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, and in the process turned to Ibn al-Arabī's *barzakh* and Louis Marin's neutral. Both terms define an intermediary space, which has as its main characteristic the ability to act as a limit. Both concepts imply an ontological third space, which simultaneously divides and brings together two things without becoming either one or the other.

Furthermore, I have shown that the space of the *barzakh*, or the neutral, is not a static, inert vacuum, but rather it is transitional space opening itself up to an encounter, not only between objects in space, nor only between different spaces, or realities, but also between the self, space and objects in space.

Another point that came to the fore was that the *barzakh* has epistemological value, for in bringing together two paradoxical realities, such as real and unreal, or rational and imaginative, the *barzakh* has the capacity to become a space where knowledge is produced and gained. It can, thus, be claimed that the *barzakh* acts as the joint horizon from which both the real and unreal are reflected. The *barzakh*, then, is in its very essence creative, for through it all things are defined and given existence.

In Chapter Two I have also referred to Henri Lefebvre and his explanation of the —spatial architectonics” of the mirror, emphasizing the double surface of the mirror in the apprehension of reality. Here the mirror becomes, at one

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and the same time, the unifying factor and the divider between image and form. Although the mirror is the visual repetition of an object in space, Lefebvre emphasises that this reflection is simultaneously the same and other than the same. The mirror's reflection is basically an interaction between appearance and distinction, whereby it provides a symmetrical replication of the reflected world, in consequence establishing both a physical (the space of the object or body) and a virtual (the space of the reflected object or body) spatiality founded on delineation.

The mirror is a surface at once pure and impure, almost material yet virtually unreal, it presents the Ego with its own material presence, calling up its counterpart, its absence from—and at the same time its inherence in—this other' space. Inasmuch as its symmetry is projected therein, the Ego is liable to recognise' itself in the other', but it does not in fact coincide with it: other' merely represents Ego' as an inverted image . . . as a reflection which yet generates an extreme difference. . . . Here what is identical is at the same time radically other, radically different—and transparency is equivalent to opacity.⁴

What is important in these observations of Henri Lefebvre, especially in relation to this chapter and the chapters that follow, is that these arguments underline the dual nature of spaces identified as neutral. These neutral spaces, such as the garden, serve a mediating or intermediary role. This role is the result of these spaces ability to contain —opacities, bodies and objects, centres of efferent actions and effervescent energies,” as well as —hidden— even impenetrable—places, areas of viscosity, and black holes.” Simultaneously, these spaces offer its visitor or occupant, —sequences, sets

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 184, 185.

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of objects, concatenation of bodies,” and the opportunity for the discovery of new relationships or experiences. The garden, as neutral space is forever shifting from the non-visible sphere into the visible and from opacity into transparency.⁵

However, Lefebvre also stresses, while negotiating this dual spatiality the subject is not a passive bystander, but actively engaged in the processes of visual signification. For Lefebvre, —mirroring” has a more important role than merely offering a stable projection of images, but rather it plays a structuring role in the relationship between the physical world and the subject embedded in that world. It is a relationship built around both subject and object being rooted in the physicality of the world, while simultaneously highlighting the confrontation between this rootedness and a transcended body in space.

The interest and importance of the mirror derives not, therefore, from the fact that it projects the subject's (or Ego's) image back to the subject (or Ego), but rather from the fact that it extends a repetition (symmetry) immanent to the body into space. The Same (ego) and the Other thus confront each other, as alike as it is possible to imagine, all but identical, yet differing absolutely, for the image has no density, no weight.⁶

The importance of this —act of mirroring” is its ability to present us with a complex physical and social setting. It is here where symbolic and imaginary realms connect with the physical and material landscape. In a —process of decipherment,” which Lefebvre claims is always perpetual, we can apprehend this movement —where bodies pass from their natural obscurity

⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 183.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 182, Note 14.

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into the light, not in an arbitrary manner but according to a specific sequence, order or articulation.”⁷

Keeping Lefebvre’s arguments in mind, I want to draw attention back to the space of the *barzakh* and the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. The *barzakh*, as the space of the mirror, acts as a relational and dialectical vehicle between the physical landscape, the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, and its representation in thought and literature. It can be argued that by looking into the —mirror” or the space of the *barzakh*, a person, at one and the same time, becomes aware of the spatiality and physicality of the garden spaces, while also being able to —read” the illumination of meanings projected by the gardens. Here, we presuppose that the —mirror,” thus, the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, is real, the space in the mirror imaginary, and the —focus of the imagination is the Ego.”⁸ It is by looking at and experiencing the gardens that people can imagine or recreate their own projections of the gardens presented, even though these projections are always, also, influenced by social constructs.

However, as I will argue, it is through this effect of mirroring that the space of the *barzakh* shows itself in a double reflection. When a living body confronts the space of the mirror as the *barzakh*, thus, experiencing the *barzakh* as a reflection of the imaginary, the effect becomes real. Here the self, as a body in space, recognises within the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra the

⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 183.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

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presence of the *barzakh* as something “real,” something that can be visualised.

On the one hand, landscape and garden, as a microcosm of landscape, are thus always constructed space, or to use Lefebvre’s term, produced space. They offer us a signification that can be decoded and read, even though this dialectical process is limited to those who have knowledge of its language and codes. It is, according to Lefebvre, in this process of conceptualizing space that physical, mental and social spaces conflate to become no longer distinguishable.⁹ James Dickie states that gardens are a very common life-symbol in all cultures. Each culture, however, develops its own garden iconography built from a collective memory or, in Jungian terms, an archetype, which through history guarantees that image’s resonant value.¹⁰ These descriptively powerful images of gardens become part of the production of space, which in a specific context and through the lenses of a specific spatial imagination can merge architectural space and worldview to create a garden space receptive for interpretation.

On the other hand, gardens, as D. Fairchild Ruggles so eloquently argues, do more than merely reflect the relationship between humans and their natural environment. They act as an intermediary between the two and provide the means by which humans organise their world and make it comprehensible. A garden changes shape as a result of changes in human

⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 17.

¹⁰ James Dickie, “The Hispano-Arab Garden: Its Philosophy and Function,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31.2 (1968): 237-248. See also his chapter “The Palaces of the Alhambra” in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, ed. Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 135-152.

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perception, just as perception changes depending on whose gaze it is and these factors will determine the eventual meaning given to the garden.¹¹

When looking at gardens from this point of view, especially those gardens that have captured the imagination of multiple generations, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, it becomes clear that they have entered into a specific category, which Henri Lefebvre classifies as monumental space. Monumental space, according to Lefebvre, is much more than merely a collection of symbols, although every monument embodies symbols. Neither is it merely a chain of signs, although it is made up by signs. Monumental space is not only the boundary between inside and outside, but in addition becomes defined by what takes place there and what does not. Lefebvre understands monumental space to have —a horizon of meaning, a specific or indefinite multiplicity of meanings, a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore by means of—and for the sake of—a particular action.”¹² Monumental space is a creative space made up of multiple dialogues between the private language of personal conversation and the public language of social discourses.¹³

Entering the gardens of the Alhambra, to quote Lefebvre, is to enter and sojourn in a poetic world which involves —levels, layers and sedimentations of perception, representation, and spatial practice which presuppose one another, which proffer themselves to one another, and which are

¹¹ D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscapes and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 7, 8.

¹² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 224.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 222.

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superimposed upon one another.”¹⁴ As the *barzakh*, the gardens of the Alhambra are physical, mental and social spaces that open themselves up to be read and in this “reading” they become fluid and flexible. However, it is clear that by “reading” these gardens, there is a dynamic interaction between subject and object. Although the interaction is framed by a specific typology or social environment, movement through, and perception of, the garden becomes an inherent part of the interpretation process. As Lefebvre notes:

The incessant deciphering process is objective as much as subjective—in which respect it indeed transcends the old philosophical distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. It becomes more acute as soon as concealed parts of space (the internal portions of things and things outside the field of perception) come to have associated with themselves symbols, or corresponding signs or indices, which are often tabooed, holy/evil, revelatory or occult. It is in this sense that it cannot be properly described as either a subjective or an objective, a conscious or unconscious, activity; rather it is an activity which serves to generate consciousness: messages, by virtue of space and of the interplay of reflections and mirages within it, are intrinsic to lived experience itself.¹⁵

However, to be clear this chapter is not about the origins, environmental aspects, political functions or symbolic meaning of the Islamic Garden.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183, 184.

¹⁶ See Elisabeth Blair MacDougal and Richard Ettinghausen, eds., *The Islamic Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1976) for an interesting introduction to the Islamic Garden. For a focus on the diversity of Islamic gardens see D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscape* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). On the design characteristics and symbolism of Islamic gardens, see John Brookes, *Gardens of Paradise* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1987), Elizabeth B. Moynihan, *Paradise as a Garden in Persia and Mughal India* (New York: George Braziller, 1979) and Emma Clark, *The Art of the Islamic Garden* (Wiltshire: The Crowood Press, 2004). See also Attilio Petruccioli and Khalil K. Pirani, eds. Foreword by Oleg Grabar, *Understanding Islamic Architecture* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002) and Michel Conan, ed., *Middle East Garden Traditions: Unity and Diversity* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2007). Attilio Petruccioli, “Thinking the Islamic Garden” *Yale F&ES Bulletin* 103 (1994),

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Rather, this chapter concerns itself with mapping the space of the *barzakh*. It is a process of pointing out the physical attributes of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, which in the mirroring of the general characteristics of a courtyard garden express an image of the universe that a person can decode and read.

In line with these arguments, I will place myself in the shoes of a twelfth century Alhambra Palace visitor and with Ibn al-Arabi at my side explore the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as spaces of the imagination open to interpretation. It is, however, important to make clear from the start certain interpretative decisions essential to that objective. As I seek to reconstruct the spatial experience of the Nasrid viewer of a garden space, theoretically argued as the *barzakh*, I presuppose an elite group of palace occupants familiar with the writings and thoughts of Ibn al-Arabi.¹⁷ Furthermore, central to my interpretive approach in this chapter, I assume the existence of a spatial sensibility, or a particular awareness of space, which shaped by a multilayered and complex worldview shows a predisposition towards a spatial organization focussed on an aesthetics of perception. It is also important to remember that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra do not exist in a vacuum, but carries with them all the ideological and cultural constructions embedded in the history of the Alhambra itself and the Islamic garden particularly.

<http://environment.research.yale.edu/documents/downloads/0-9/103petruccioli.pdf>.
(accessed April 13, 2009).

¹⁷ See Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 167-200. One of the important figures in Nasrid Granada, Ibn al-Khatib, Vizier to Muhammad V (r. 755/1354-760/1359) demonstrates a deep understanding of Ibn al-Arabi's doctrine in his work "Garden of Instruction in Noble Love" based on the symbol of the universal tree.

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Therefore, it is not my intention to offer an objective reconstruction of a past history, for that would necessarily encompass many other dialogues, primarily in the areas of perception theory, aesthetics, architecture, landscape studies, religion and politics, which on their own are vast and complex fields with their own discourses and challenges. My aim is, only, to put forward a creative reading of a specific garden space, certainly influenced by current scholarship on courtyard gardens, by turning to Ibn al-Arabi's theories on the *barzakh* as a space of the imagination.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts on garden spaces, as spaces of the imagination, intermediary spaces, where encounters between opposites take place and the attainment of knowledge becomes possible. I will, furthermore, show that Ibn al-Arabi's teachings concerning the *barzakh* establish an aesthetic of the garden as a space of vision, an imaginative, but simultaneously real space. Throughout this discussion I will turn to the Court of Myrtles and the Court of Lions to demonstrate how the spatial and physical qualities of these gardens mirror the characteristics of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*. Through a symphony of light and shadow, movement and stasis, the divide between inside and outside is collapsed and they become, at one and the same time, existent and non-existent.

Firstly, I turn to the historian and theorist of architecture Malcolm Quantrill who provides me with the tools to place courtyard gardens within a specific architectural framework. Quantrill argues that gardens exist within frameworks, which imply a language code that needs to be deciphered and

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decoded. Emphasis here is on the subject's knowledge of the garden codes and her/his perception of a specific garden space. Garden and subject engage in a dialectical partnership that encourages a union of real and unreal in the creation of new relationships.

However, when moving my attention to the gardens of the Alhambra, it becomes apparent that these gardens have moved beyond the boundaries of their physical space and have become part of the collective dialogue of various generations.¹⁸ In fact, one of the gardens' most noticeable characteristics is that they have been carefully studied, dissected, analysed and classified from various perspectives and from very different scholastic interests and pursuits. It is for this reason that it is also important not only to understand the general characteristics associated with the courtyard garden, but to turn our attention to the courtyard garden in Islamic thought specifically, as well as paying attention to the concept of landscape in the Arabic language. By tracing the Arab lexicology of landscape and gardens, it will be possible for me to argue for the existence of a spatial landscape model that is defined in terms of visual, sensory and aesthetic criteria. I think that understanding the already inherent association between garden, perception and beauty will be an apt starting point to appreciate the close bond between garden and knowledge in the thought of Ibn al-Arabi.

Thus, with Ibn al-Arabi as my guide I explore how the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, architecturally as well as imaginatively, move between

¹⁸ Malcolm Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory: Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), xiv, 46

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dynamism and stasis, containment and exposure, and most importantly between perception and knowledge. Here the garden itself becomes the borderline, the limit between light and shadow, mirroring depths of meaning for a person to expose. This chapter, then, presents us with a physical description of the courtyard gardens and how they, imaginatively, can be interpreted and attributed with meaning.

LANDSCAPE INTO MEANING

D. Fairchild Ruggles makes a very fundamental point when stating that gardens and landscapes are elusive subjects. They are positioned in both space and time yet belong to neither exclusively because they are simultaneously a living presence and a memory.

I have referred to Foucault's heterotopic space in the previous chapter and pointed out that gardens understood within these parameters are heterotopias. Foucault argued that space can not only be defined through its location and content, but is also a product of time and history. Garden space is thus always the product of a society that defines it and places it within a discourse of space, which can be utopian, dystopian or heterotopian. These discourses, then, enter either consciously or subconsciously into the shared cultural imagination. According to Foucault the medieval Islamic gardens can be considered heterotopias because these gardens have a mythic dimension

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attributed to them. Medieval Islamic gardens often represented paradise, both metaphorically and in their physical design.¹⁹

However, as I will argue, gardens can be considered heterotopias because of their liminal quality and the fact that although they are very much physical, their presence also moves a person psychologically. They are in effect a Thirdspace.²⁰ If we should apply Edward Soja's classification, the garden's physical qualities would be a Firstspace, thus referring to its geographical and physical reality as perceived. Secondspace would be the garden's mapped reality presented to us pictorially and in literature. Thirdspace would be the garden as lived space encompassing all cultural values, rituals and events, thus the garden as spatial practice. As Thirdspace, the garden is not a static symbol, but rather it functions as a dynamic space of action mediating between architecture, body and self. Soja's term, Thirdspace, thus implies a dialectical encounter between garden and visitor. Furthermore, as Thirdspace it can also be considered a liminal space, physically mediating between outside and inside and psychologically between concepts of wild nature and cultivated space.²¹

It is important to once again point out that I am concerned with the garden as a space of the *barzakh*, which means that I am establishing a framework of the garden in terms of space that can act as a dialectical medium, bringing

¹⁹ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 25. For a short bibliographical note on the concept of a paradise garden in Islam see Note 15. See also Note 46

²⁰ See Chapter Two, Note 10.

²¹ Katharine T. Von Stackelberg, *The Roman Garden: Space, Sense, and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 52, 53. Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 53-82.

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together the paradoxical and presenting us with the extra-ordinary and unexpected. As a result, we are dealing with a physical garden and not an imagined geography that has become “real” because the image or representation has come to define and order its reality. When this happens, the garden, itself, disappears into the distance as a fixed and dead signifier with only its symbols surviving.²²

However, as Thirdspace, the garden can become an interstitial space structured between the physical and the imaginative, not restricted to either one, but also simultaneously both. In this sense, landscape and garden can become part of what Malcolm Quantrill calls an environmental framework. He explains that such a framework does not depend only on its perceivable or visible elements, but most often carries an underlying metaphysical or ritual order, as well. Furthermore, because this order is part of its “fourth dimension” of mythical or cultural histories, it is not immediately noticeable in the form.

Our experience of physical environments depends upon changing perceptions of patterns generated by solid and void, light and shade—patterns which reveal forms in space as we move among them and change our position in relation to them. It is this direct existential experience, combined with the imagery we perceive in our surroundings, that offers the basic material of environmental memory.²³

Essential to Quantrill’s idea of an environmental framework is what he calls the *genius loci*, or spirit of a place. The *genius loci* of a place, according to him, will possess both general characteristics of such a place, its “presence,”

²² Soja, *Thirdspace*, 79.

²³ Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, xiv.

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and more detailed features, its identity.” The spirit of a place depends upon the special relationship things in that place share with each other.

Being in the same place in the same environmental framework, things set up an interaction by that very coexistence so that they become intelligible to us not only as isolated phenomena but also as integrated parts of a whole. We may conceive environmental frameworks that conform to an underlying order of things according to naturally or culturally ritualistic principles. However, we will perceive those frameworks in terms of certain characteristics of form, material, color, directional emphasis (horizontal or vertical), pattern, texture, and so on, which give a distinctive set of images to a particular building or place.²⁴

Environmental frameworks come into existence because structural relationships develop between an idea, an image and a meaning, and the expression of these ideas in a specific social environment. These strategic relationships impose a meaningful ordering onto architectural elements when they are used in architecture and landscape architecture, such as walls, columns, openings, fountains and other structures. Furthermore, it is out of these relationships that a typology develops whereby particular architectural forms become the basis for cultural action and memory. Form becomes capable of connecting people to a deep well of human consciousness, keeping open the channels of historical continuity by the myths, ideas, rituals and events it represents.”²⁵ Landscapes exist within frameworks, which hold the forms and ideas that give shape and meaning to the landscape. This association, pertaining to what is observed and how it is seen, establishes a relationship between a space and the objects within that space. In addition, it

²⁴ Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, xiv, 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 46-48.

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is this interaction that generates a particular framework of reference, which Quantrill calls the representational matrix. It is within this representational matrix that we encounter a dialogue between real spaces and spaces in the landscape of ideas which extends beyond the material confines of form.

Beginning with a journey through architectural space, we leave behind material form and explore a path through the labyrinth of reconstructed memories into a new poetic landscape which is as much symbolic as it is real. Such an extraspatial dimension of architecture, by opening windows on a landscape that extends beyond perception, unleashes the latent energy store of architecture—its expression of consciousness.²⁶

However, even though Quantrill refers here to a movement beyond the material confines of form, I believe that what is implied here is not merely a movement from form to sign and metaphor, but rather that the physical and the mental remain in a dialogue where the one ultimately depends upon the other and both rely on a body in space. An “image,” like the image in a mirror, always reflects back upon its physical form, and as Lefebvre has pointed out, the locus of this reflection is always the body in space, thus the physical form is never left behind. Consequently, I am arguing, it is only by entering the garden through its architectural structure that we will be able to “read” its mirroring of a “*genius loci*” steeped in the representational framework of the *barzakh*.

THE COURTYARD GARDEN

The medieval Spanish philosopher Ibn Bajjah (Avempace) (d. 1138) once said that “to know is to find one’s orientation towards forms, those principles

²⁶ Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, 57-59.

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that give actuality and reality to the material realm.”²⁷ It is an accepted fact that gardens are by definition little paradises on earth; they are associated with order and pleasure in a hostile and chaotic world.²⁸ Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit maintain that gardens are places where nature is simultaneously excluded and included by means of water, shade and plants. Furthermore, it is the enclosed garden or the garden courtyard, which by its very form, gives authenticity to a specific space. The enclosed garden brings together the hostile world outside and the sanctuary within. They explain:

The garden shows the landscape its containing walls, and in the garden the natural horizon is shut out and replaced by an internal horizon, the upper edge of its surround. Inside a paradise is depicted. . . . The garden gathers the landscape around it (garden) and at the same time shuts itself off from it (enclosed). The enclosed garden is as broad as the landscape, in that it incorporates the expansiveness of the sky, and as contained as a building. Thus it is an intermediary between man and landscape. It is both inside and outside, landscape and architecture, endless and finite.²⁹

Ibn Bajah’s observation that knowledge is the result of one’s orientation towards form probably finds in the courtyard garden its most pertinent location. The courtyard garden brings together architecture and landscape by interpreting and reworking nature, creating a visual representation of nature

²⁷ Ibn Bajah (Avempace) (d.1138), “On the Union between the Intellect and Man” *The Conduct of the Solitary, (Itisal al-Aql bi’l-Insan)* in Eugene F. Bale, *Philosophy in the West* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2008), 151.

²⁸ Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001), 10. See also Elizabeth B. Moynihan, *Paradise as a Garden: In Persia and Mughal India* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 1, John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 16 and Jonas Lehrman, *Earthly Paradise: Garden and Courtyard in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 31-33.

²⁹ Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden* 10, 22-36.

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through explicit architectural forms. These architectural forms not only visually represent nature, but they also allow individuals to orient themselves in space, time and society.

According to Aben and de Wit's arguments, the world is made comprehensible through the courtyard's architectural shapes, which enable people to interact with their surroundings. They highlight three types of orientation: cosmic, temporal and territorial orientation. Cosmic orientation, according to them, is the primitive experience of being on this earth and in the courtyard it is provided by the opposition between heaven and earth, high and low, vertical and horizontal, light and dark. The garden is open to the sky and this link between sky and garden plays a significant role as it creates a tangible axis between heaven and earth. Orientation and a sense of direction are given by the sun's path and that of the moon and stars. The rhythm of the seasons and of day and night enable temporal orientation as they bring about a totally different experience of the same space. Territorial orientation comes from the visible topography, the simultaneous presence of far and near, the duality of centre and periphery and inside and outside. Aben and de Wit conclude by stating that:

The most pronounced form of the enclosure is the wall. It restricts the exchange between inside and outside to manageable openings so that entry through it is consciously experienced. A sense of security prevails within the walled enclosure through the palpable presence and solidity of the walls and the balance between space and mass. The outermost limit of the visible is shifted from the horizon to the wall and the visible world splits into an internal and an external world. . . . In the *Hortus Conclusus* the containment of the space is stressed by the directly

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visible presence of the limitless sky. Limited dimensions against endless space, the mass of the walls against the space of the garden, the invisibility of the world outside against the view of the sky.³⁰

The enclosed garden is in one respect an architectural object, but it is also a garden. Aben and de Wit point out that it is a garden wherein the landscape is made apparent. They identify three ways whereby landscape is made apparent in the enclosed garden: visualizing, complementing and symbolising. Gardens reflect the landscape by means of trees, flowers and water, however in the courtyard garden these aspects are often reduced to a minimum. This minimalism makes the complimentary aspect of the courtyard even stronger. Emptiness and enclosure put into strong relief the expansiveness and openness of the landscape outside. The landscape is not only symbolically present in the courtyard garden, but the courtyard garden becomes, itself, a symbol of the landscape beyond.

Although the enclosed garden is perceived as a microcosm of the larger macrocosm, it does not exist in isolation, but similar to the function of a limit, it stands in relation to the landscape beyond its walls. While the courtyard garden is, within itself, a complete unit, as garden space it is always regarded in relation to the landscape and its surrounding walls. The reciprocal relationship between courtyard garden and landscape beyond is emphasised through the use of architectural forms, which through their spatial design and visual structure give meaning to the idea of freedom and constraint.

³⁰ Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, 35-37.

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It is clear that the courtyard, or enclosed garden, is essentially a contradiction. The courtyard garden presents us with an answer to Louis Marin's question, whether we can have a space that offers us a vision of two contradictions presented as one.³¹ The courtyard garden does exactly that as it presents us a vision of the world where two opposing terms are brought together and viewed together in one existential space. It is at the same time inside and outside, landscape and architecture, finite and infinite, constant and yet ever changing. The courtyard garden is Marin's neutral and it fulfils the role of what Malcolm Quantrill identifies as the *Zwischenraum*, the space between³². Here the forms and structures of the courtyard garden not only represent the frameworks of reality and myth, their very physicality engenders those perceptions.

The courtyard garden, as a neutral, in-between space produces its own "*genius loci*" or spirit of place. Within the natural environment of the garden there is a certain presence which extends into the realm of the imagination.³³ This presence involves, according to Quantrill, a meeting and merging of spirit with existence. In the courtyard garden a person's concrete and existential awareness of place becomes enhanced by a spiritual or abstract awareness provoked by her/his orientation towards specific forms. This awareness implies that along with the visual aspect to the garden, there is also a deeper, inner structure, connected to a person's subconscious. Here

³¹ See Chapter Two.

³² Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, 63, 64.

³³ This existence of "presence," especially "presence" in the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, will be explored and discussed in full detail in a later chapter.

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cultural memories and ideas provide a specific context to the perceived spaces of the courtyard.³⁴

THE COURTYARD GARDEN WITHIN A MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK

Samer Akkach expresses a view similar to Malcolm Quantrill's environmental framework by stating that a —spatial sensibility mediates between layered cosmological, geographical and bodily conceptions and deliberate spatial ordering.”³⁵ Turning his attention to a premodern Islamic sensibility, Akkach claims that within such a framework the cosmos was thought of and described as being finite, bounded and within astronomically definable limits, which made it graspable in its entirety by means of geometry, numbers and the alphabet. Placing the cosmos within such a framework prompted a mode of reasoning that effectively integrated the spatiality of the cosmos with architectural or geographical spaces. This integration allowed people to interact fluently without the need of specific theoretical mediation. However, according to Akkach, the consistency of this preference for geometrically ordered spaces with isotropic qualities, across geo-cultural, temporal and typological boundaries, implies a spatial sensibility more distinctively premodern than Islamic. This tendency establishes the fact that spatial sensibility remains an elusive concept, even though it is graspable through the sense of ordering and spatial structure it reveals.

³⁴ Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, 48, 49.

³⁵ Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam: An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), xviii. Akkach argues that there is throughout the Islamic world a tendency to order spaces according to a cruciform layout, which is traceable in a good number of examples to suggest consistency and ubiquity across geographical, temporal and cultural distances, although this order also reveals significant stylistic variations across time and geography.

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Akkach identifies two types of composition within the architectural framework of these spaces, a concentric composition and a linear composition. A concentric composition includes all forms that are laid out around a stationary centre, whereby the spatial order of the three-dimensional cross is expressed in a static arrangement. The linear composition's main characteristic is repetition, which conveys a sense of motion and flexibility. These linear spatial characteristics, however, do not move away from the spatial characteristics that underlie concentric compositions, as it still maintains the order of quadrature, centrality and an axial composition. From an analogical perspective, the concentric composition is the basis for the linear composition just as the point becomes the point from which the line extends and stillness the state from which movement proceeds. Although there are multiple variations, this form is consistently recognised in secular as well as religious buildings. As a result, surviving premodern courtyard gardens reveal a tendency to organise space symmetrically around a central point. Furthermore, they tend to identify, in one form or another, a directional cross that may or may not be aligned with the cardinal points. The result is most often a courtyard with one central element, such as a fountain or water pool and four vaulted doorways. Within this spatial order individual spaces are —pictorially and experientially unified.”³⁶

³⁶ Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, xviii. Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, 151, 157, 158. See also Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 68, 89.

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According to Jonas Lehrman, symmetry in the garden courtyard often takes a —bilateral or mirror-image form.”³⁷ There is generally a central channel or feature around which the elements of the garden are placed in a square or rectangular layout. This sense of space orientates the person either inwards towards a centrally placed fountain or outwards towards its defining boundary.³⁸ The courtyard is not an empty space, but exhibits a dynamic spatial order where there is simultaneously an emphasis on movement and stasis. Through its representational matrix the paradox between order and disorder, unity and perplexity, are resolved and the courtyard garden becomes the paradigm for social order, religious unity and individual transcendence.

Another scholar who argues that there exists a —sense of place” in architecture is Nader Ardalan. Similarly to Akkach, he states that the garden can be viewed as a defined space which, within itself, encompasses a total reflection of the cosmos. This space becomes a positive system of design, whereby order and harmony within the beholder is fostered and made manifest to the senses by means of numbers, geometry, colour and design. However, he adds to the argument in the sense that he points out there exists two categories of gardening, each with their own attached —sense of place,” mirroring a specific view of experiencing —being-in-the-world.”

Two categories of gardens exists: (1) *Bagh* (garden), a manifestation of the centrifugally orientated form of the microcosm, symbolizing the

³⁷ Jonas Lehrman, *Earthly Paradise: Garden and Courtyard in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 41.

³⁸ See also Ardalan and Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity*, 68.

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manifest (*al-zahir*) and *tazhibih* dimensions of the Absolute, and (2) *hayat* (courtyard), a manifestation of the centripetally oriented form of the microcosm symbolizing the hidden (*al-batin*) and *tanzih* dimension. They may be viewed as mutually complimentary and completing the two aspects of Islamic place making.³⁹

From these arguments it becomes clear that interpreting the courtyard garden symbolically and as a metaphor for orientating oneself towards ultimate reality was an accepted way of thought in medieval Islamic culture. Although gardens developed as a need to tame nature and provide food, placed within a particular framework the garden was able to gather around it a vocabulary that had meaning to those who were able to translate and interpret its forms. Later, these garden spaces came to occupy two spatial categories, the representational garden in pictures and literature and the physical space of the designed garden. However, as Katharine T. Von Stackelberg points out in her discussion of the Roman garden, these alternate conceptions, the literary and the physical, were not merely a —palimpsestic arrangement of one then the other”; rather, they should be perceived as a —palimpsest,” the one overlaying the other, resulting in a —interplay of multiple associations.”⁴⁰

ARABIC LEXICOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE AND GARDEN

In *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest*, Han Lörzing defines landscape as a perceptible piece of land which is shaped by the joint effects

³⁹ Nader Ardalan, —Simultaneous Perplexity”: The Paradise Garden as the Quintessential Visual Paradigm of Islamic Architecture and Beyond” in *Understanding Islamic Architecture*, ed. Attilio Petruccioli and Khalil K. Pirani (London: RoutledgeCurzon), 10, 11.

⁴⁰ Von Stackelberg, *The Roman Garden*, 49.

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of human intervention and natural forces. In this definition Lörzing points out that landscape is not just a product of nature, found in factors such as climate, soil, fauna and flora, but also a deliberate or even unintentional human creation. Furthermore, he explains that landscape is more than just this co-production between humans and nature. Nature is perceived and interpreted by individuals and that makes it a product of the mind as well. Most importantly, however, is that it is through this act of interpretation that the individual gives the landscape its meaning.⁴¹

It is important to note the value attributed to an individual's perception of landscape in order for her/him to interpret that landscape and add value to it. This emphasis on perception is, also, the very essence of the Arabic word for landscape, *mandẓar*. The *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* defines *mandẓar* as sight, view, panorama, outlook and perspective, an object seen or viewed, scenery, a place commanding a sweeping view, lookout and *mandẓar āmm* as general view, landscape, scenery and panorama. The word is also linked to *mindẓār*, which means telescope, magnifying glass or mirror. *Mandẓar* is derived from the verb *naẓara*, which means to perceive with the eyes, see, regard, look, gaze, glance, but also envisage, consider, contemplate, pay attention, put one's mind to, direct one's attention or observe attentively. It becomes clear that the Arabic word for landscape denotes both object and subject and as verb it has the concrete meaning of looking with the eyes, as well as a conceptual meaning, which is to understand and to evaluate.

⁴¹ Han Lörzing, *The Nature of Landscape: A Personal Quest* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001), 37.

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The Arabic language, in addition, makes the movement from landscape to a more specific garden space more fluent, since the words *naḍara u*, *naḍira a* and *naḍura u* mean to be flourishing, blooming, verdant, fresh, beautiful, bright, brilliant, luminous and radiant. Moreover, *naḍra* can either mean bloom, flower and freshness or glamour, splendour, beauty, opulence and wealth.⁴²

It is an accepted fact that the Islamic world is varied and wide-ranging in its organizing of human society and as a consequence in its ways of cultivating the earth and gardening methods. What may linger upon the Arab lexicology of landscape shows, however, is that landscapes, or more specifically gardens, share a common thread. A garden is understood as a specific space that a person perceives and contemplates; it is also closely linked to beauty and even wealth and power.⁴³

Lamia Latiri claims that the Arabic word for landscape, *mandzar*, implies three constant parameters. Firstly, the garden is a medium for perception, but this perceptual operation does not rely exclusively on sight but includes other senses as well. Secondly, it involves a perceiving subject, either an individual or the collective, in whose imagination the representation of landscape is placed within a framework which attributes a general significance to the elements contained within. Thirdly, it involves an infinitely varied list of stereotypes or models by which the isolated elements of the gaze are

⁴² J. Milton Cowan, ed. *Arabic English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1976), 972, 974, 977.

⁴³ See Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscape* for a detailed argument that Islamic gardens are also powerful symbols of political territory.

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assessed and valued.⁴⁴ Although the experience of such a place is dynamic, because landscape is never static, but subject to weather changes, seasonal changes and even momentary changes in light and sound and smells, there is always a framework of cultural memory and meanings accompanying it.⁴⁵

At the same time the Arabic word *janna*, which also means garden or paradise, comes from a root meaning to conceal, to veil or become dark.⁴⁶ The courtyard garden is concealed or veiled from the landscape outside, but simultaneously, its forms and structures conceal the landscape within.

Although Ruggles criticises a narrow interpretation of all Islamic gardens as representations of paradise on earth, it cannot be ignored that the idea of paradise, from its conceptual beginnings in ancient Mesopotamia and Persia and its incorporation into the Abrahamic faiths, became a very important design conception of place-making in Islamic cultures. The idea of paradise gardens were aided by Qur'anic descriptions of paradise, which implicitly associated gardens with contemplation and beauty, developing it into a powerful visual paradigm, that of the courtyard garden. To quote Nader Ardalan, —spirit and matter have reached a perfect union in a visual model of great potency.” Ardalan explains that in formal religious terms the paradigm deals with the concept of a primordial timeless unity at the mythic creation of humankind in the Garden of Eden, as well as the place promised for the righteous on judgement day.

⁴⁴ Lamia Latiri, —The Meaning of Landscape in Classical Arabo-Muslim Culture” *Cybergeo: European Journal of Geography* 196.16 (2001): 5, 6. <http://cybergeo.revues.org/4042?file=1> (accessed April 13, 2009).

⁴⁵ Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscape*, 3-10.

⁴⁶ J. Milton Cowan, ed. *Arabic English Dictionary*, 138.

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Metaphorically, paradise is that specific place of mind where a person feels at one with the whole universe. Visually, the paradigm is a geometrically designed walled garden, containing water channels laid out cross-axially in the four cardinal directions and emanating from a central fountain, which finds its allegorical description in the Qur'anic Suras.⁴⁷ Ardalan concludes that the paradise paradigm in both the Islamic visual model as well as in the mythic image of humankind merges together a material impression of beauty and a non-material allusion to the essential order innate in the cosmos.⁴⁸ However, as I have already pointed out, my focus is on the physical experience of the courtyard gardens as a *barzakh*. Therefore, although drawing on these discussions of spatial ordering in premodern Islam will enable me to map parallels in the geometrically ordered spaces of the Alhambra garden courtyards, I believe that it is only through vision and perception of the physical garden's presence that a person can discover its hidden realities.

IBN AL-ARABI: MARKET OF THE GARDEN

The crux of Ibn al-Arabi's understanding of the *barzakh* lies in the fact that nothing can be itself by itself, that between existent and non-existent things there is always a third thing, which through its unifying-separating nature

⁴⁷ See Sura: 47. 15. Maulana Muhammad Ali, *English Translation of the Holy Quran: With Explanatory Notes*, ed. Zahid Aziz (Wembley: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K., 2010), 633. See also Emma Clark, *Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden* (London: The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, 1996). See also Al-Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Alawi *Islamic Doctrines and Beliefs*, Vol. 1, trans. Dr. Sibril Fouad Haddad (Fenter: As-Sunna Foundation of America, 1999), 86-87 for a reference to the rivers seen by the Muhammad during his *Isra* and *Mi'raj*.

⁴⁸ Ardalan, "Simultaneous Perplexity," 9, 10. See James Dickie, "The Hispano-Arab Garden: Its Philosophy and Function," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Africa Studies, University of London* 31.2 (1968): 237-248. See Lehrman, *Earthly Paradise*, 31-39.

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brings them together and acts as their mutual possibility. The *barzakh*, as limit, is the mediator between being and non-being and as such it becomes the creative force to all existence.

In isolating Ibn al-Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* I have tried to show how Ibn al-Arabi created a space where ontology and epistemology are brought together by means of hermeneutics. Ibn al-Arabi's theory argues that ontologically all things are simultaneously existent and non-existent. He understood the domain of existence, or Absolute Being, as manifesting the creation of all things and the domain of nonexistence as including all things that are not manifested. Existence as well as nonexistence cannot be observed, but the existence of a third domain, the imagination, allowed for both existence and nonexistence to be witnessed.⁴⁹ Samer Akkach explains that imagination is the domain where meaning and form are merged; resulting in a new world that simultaneously unites and separates its —parental domains.” Imagination can be thought of in terms of a twilight zone that separates and unites darkness.⁵⁰

Ibn al-Arabi's concept of space involved a hierarchical and multilayered view where everything consisted of an interior and exterior aspect, the interior as

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of imagination in the theories of Ibn al-Arabi see William C. Chittick, —Ibn Arabi,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/> (accessed March 13, 2009). Imagination is also discussed by William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of the Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 115-124 and William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 332-370. On the Creative Imagination see Henri Corbin, *Alone with the Alone* (Mahwah: Princeton University Press, 1969).

⁵⁰ Samer Akkach, —The World of Imagination in Ibn Arabi's Ontology,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24.1 (1997): 102. Ibn al-Arabi, —Towards Sainthood: States and Stations,” in *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 169-180.

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the essence of Absolute Being and the exterior in the form of the manifested world. Standing between the exterior and the interior was the space of the imagination, which through contemplation, or in his words —“witnessing,” gave meaning to form and thus granted insight and knowledge. This dual nature of all existence is explained by Ibn al-Arabi as signs that are made up by an invisible essence and a visible form. Through contemplation a person can come to understand the relationship between these two parts of a sign. The faculty of the imagination enables this contemplation, which would then lead to the realization of true knowledge. Imagination is thus able to bring opposites together, allowing a person to see the impossible in the possible.⁵¹

The space wherein the realm of the imagination functions is for Ibn al-Arabi the space of the garden. The garden, as the marketplace of signs, simultaneously real and unreal, becomes through contemplation and witnessing a place where the attainment of knowledge takes place. In his words:

The knowledge of imagination and of its contiguous and discontinuous worlds is a magnificent pillar among the pillars of true knowledge. It is the knowledge of the *barzakh* and the knowledge of the world of corporeous bodies within which spiritual things become manifest. It is the knowledge of the Market of the Garden and the knowledge of the divine self-disclosure at the resurrection in the forms of change. (F. II 309.13)⁵²

William C. Chittick states that these two visions —“demarcate the contours of ontology and epistemology.” When something is perceived by the imagination, it is to see similarity, the unifying oneness of Being, but when it

⁵¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 116-117.

⁵² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 333.

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is perceived by the faculty of reason, it is to perceive incomparability, —the differentiating manyness of knowledge and discernment.”⁵³

Hence it has been established that imagination possesses a governing property in every mode and over every state, the sensory and the intelligible, senses and rational faculties, forms and meanings, the temporally originated and the eternal, the impossible, the possible and the Necessary. (F. II312.23, 31)⁵⁴

For Ibn al-Arabi, gardens are not only metaphorically an ideal way to understand and know the gardens of Paradise, as explained in the Qur'an, but he envisions a cosmology where gardens form part of the hierarchical composition of the macrocosm. These celestial gardens are the promised abode of happiness for those who are faithful and they occupy an in-between space between the realm of the Throne and the Footstool.⁵⁵

The wall is a circle between the center point and the encompassing circumference. The folk of the Gardens are between the wall and the circumference. (IV13.32)⁵⁶

Akkach explains that the natural world, in Ibn-al-Arabi's representation, is the “world of synthesis” and the Throne and Footstool, as threshold into the physical world, —~~the~~ a transitory domain that is neither spatial nor nonspatial.” Furthermore, it is by virtue of its —~~subtle~~, intermediary nature” that

⁵³ Chittick, —Ibn ~~Arabi~~.” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>

⁵⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 121.

⁵⁵ Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 130-132. The Throne and the Footstool are described in the Quran as God's divine seat and his Footstool as “encompassing the heavens and the earth,” (Quran 20:5, 2:255). See also Akkach's discussion on Ibn al-Arabi's paradisiacal domain consisting of eight Gardens, seven of these gardens are hierarchically ordered in seven levels and the eighth garden is a superior garden cutting across all the levels and assigned to the Prophet Muhammad. He also discusses the three types of Gardens distinguished by Ibn al-Arabi, with the four rivers running underneath it and representing the main sources of esoteric knowledge.

⁵⁶ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 226.

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the domain of the Throne and the Footstool combines the spiritual and physical characteristics of its neighbouring domains.”⁵⁷ Important, here, is that Ibn al-‘Arabī attributes sensible, spatial characteristics to the Throne and Footstool, although he warns that they are not spatial in the literal sense.

Chittick describes the Footstool as the “first imaginal thing within the embrace of the Throne” and a resting place for the two feet which manifests all dualities, which govern the physical world.⁵⁸ Frithjof Schuon explains that the Throne, in itself and independently of the level of reality, is the ‘partition’ which separates the Principle from its refraction, but this ‘partition’ is at the same time an ‘opening’, for not only does it hide the incommensurability of *Allāh*, but it expresses it and transmits it by *Ar-Rūh* (the Spirit).⁵⁹ Thus, associated with the Throne are the ideas of light (*nūr*) and spirit (*rūh*), which signifies its totality and integration. Spirit, as the centre of the Throne is often figured as a focus point or presence, with *An-Nūr* the surrounding matter.⁶⁰

Since the Footstool is the place of the two feet, it allows for only two abodes in the next world, the Fire and the Garden. . . . Through the act of these two feet within the celestial sphere, there became manifest within the cosmos two of every kind, by the ordainment of the Inaccessible. . . . Here there is an Unseen (*ghayb*) and a visible (*shahāda*). The unseen is incomparability, and the visible is similarity. . . . There must also be an interconnecting factor (*rābi‘*) which is conceived of between the Essence and the relationship, so that the

⁵⁷ Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 125, 126.

⁵⁸ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, xxx. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 358, 359. Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 129. Akkach describes the six arms of the three-dimensional cross projecting from a common centre into opposite directions as the spatial expression associated with the Divine Feet and its referents of binaries. He states that principle of circularity is embodied by the Throne, which reflects the pattern of the divine presence.

⁵⁹ Frithjof Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam* (New York Routledge, 2007), 119

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 120. Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 129.

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essence can accept this relationship. . . . The factor which makes the odd even and the even odd is the Independent, which determines properties, but which is not determined by any properties . . . [it is] the manifestation of the property of the two sides and the middle, which is the *barzakh*, the thing between the two, like the hot, the cold and the lukewarm. (II 439.17, II 462.11, 463.12, 27)⁶¹

Consequently, the *barzakh* as envisioned by Ibn al-Arabi plays a very important role on three levels: cosmically, as the realm of the imagination between the Real and the physical world, macrocosmically, as the intermediate world between existence and nonexistence and microcosmically, as the soul between spirit and body.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the garden, as a *barzakh*, also mirrors the qualities of the *barzakh* spatially. The Celestial garden is situated in the realm of the imagination and this garden is the domain of truth and knowledge where the traveller is brought close to grasping —the interconnectedness of all things through a vast web whose Center is the Divine.”⁶²

Knowledge of the Real, or in Ibn al-Arabi's words, knowledge of the divine names, allows the traveller to enter into the supra-sensory (*ma'navi*) and sensory (*hissi*) Gardens. This knowledge is gained by recognizing within the cosmos all forms as simultaneously existent and non-existent.

⁶¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 359-361, xvii-xix. The name God has two basic meanings, the Essence, which is ultimate reality and cannot be known in positive terms, and the Level, which is God's specific position in relation to the world. Discussion of the Level is done in terms of attributes and attributions and this is known as the divine names of God. Ibn al-Arabi employs three terms to refer to these divine names: names, Attributes and Relations. William Chittick explains that the divine names and attributes are demanded by God's reality and that of the cosmos. The divine names and attributes are needed to differentiate the two sides, as well as to show how they are related, thus the names are applicable to both. Finding and recognizing these relations are, according to Ibn al-Arabi, the only way to know the cosmos in its full significance.

⁶² Ibid., 150.

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The Prophet said concerning al-Dajjāl, ‘His garden is a Fire and his Fire is a Garden,’ so he affirmed the two affairs and did not eliminate them. The Garden is a fixed Garden, and the Fire is a fixed Fire, and the forms manifest to the view of the eye may correspond exactly with the actual situation in itself, or they may not correspond. In either case, these two affairs are inescapable, whether they be imagination or other than imagination. When the two affairs are intertied in the manner that we said, there is no escape from something that brings the two together, and this is the tie. It is nothing but what is required by the essence of each. . . . Thus they are intertied through themselves, since there is nothing but creation and the Real. (IV 65.21)⁶³

Running like a thread through Ibn al-‘Arabī’s comments is his insistence on a third element between two other, which — must be one of them, or both of them. It is impossible for one of them to possess this property alone, without the other, since both of them must have it, because of the acceptance of the intertying. Through the two it becomes manifest, not through one of the two.” (IV 65.21)⁶⁴ Contemplation of the real gardens can reveal knowledge, not only about the gardens of paradise, but also about existence as these gardens can be considered as the tie between real and unreal. Within the garden, form meets essence and these constructed perceptions can have epistemological value. Thus, for Ibn al-‘Arabī the cosmos is — the garden of the Real (*bustān al-ḥaqq*). (I 679.31)⁶⁵

⁶³ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 44. Al-Dajjāl, or false messiah, is an evil figure in Islamic eschatology who pretended to be the Messiah at a time in the future before the Day of Resurrection. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/> See also Zeki Saritoprak, “The Legend of al-Dajjāl (Antichrist): The Personification of Evil in the Islamic Tradition,” *The Muslim World* 93 (2003): 291-307. <http://webmedia.jcu.edu/nursichair/files/2011/12/2003-The-Legend-of-al-Dajjal-Antichrist-The-Personification-of-Evil-in-the-Islamic-Tradition.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2013).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 294.

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In the cosmos real gardens become signs, which a person can contemplate, interpret and deconstruct to expose their underlying significance. Lifting the veils of the garden forms will reveal their intermediary nature and will expose them as simultaneously existent and nonexistent. The garden is the nexus that ties all elements together. However, according to Ibn al-Arabī, that which ties all elements together is not the same as that which it ties together, neither is it completely other. These elements are distinguished —through something else, a something else that is not in one of them, but through which both are alluded to.”⁶⁶ A garden as an intermediary space, a *barzakh*, allows for both the construction and deconstruction of things physically and imaginatively. Through it we can grasp a better understanding of that which exists, as well as witness the creation of that which is new.

Hence, from the heaven becomes manifest the earth’s ornament. Thus the heaven draped the earth with its reckoning, and the heaven stripped its ornament from it through its reckoning. From the earth’s ornament its names became many, because of the various classes of fruits, trees, and flowers within it. But from its becoming stripped and cleared, its name was made one. Its names disappeared with the disappearance of its ornament. . . . In the metaphorical interpretation, the *earth* is nothing but what is called creation,’ and its *ornament* is what is named Real.’ Hence through the Real it is ornamented, and through the Real it is cleared and stripped of the garments of number and it becomes manifest in the attribute of the One. (IV 250.23)⁶⁷

Ibn al-Arabī states that when the traveller takes the first step from the —Narrow Path into the Garden,” the traveller will, —just as the folk of the Garden, have a self-disclosure that increases their bliss,” have the door to

⁶⁶ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 44.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

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—knowledge” opened to her/him. Only then will the traveller realise that the —bliss of the Garden is renewed at each breath, as also the bliss of this world.”⁶⁸

Human beings were created only for bliss,
They were given to witness only to know
That the Real’s *wujūd* is a deposit in creation.
Is this *wujūd* anything but a gracious
Bestowal? (IV 306.20)⁶⁹

Thus, to be able to interpret the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as a *barzakh*, it is necessary to view them through Ibn al-Arabi’s eyes. For that purpose I will isolate those characteristics of the courtyard garden that mirror the essence of the qualities of the *barzakh*. By allowing Ibn al-Arabi to speak, I believe, it will be possible to see the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as an image of the *barzakh*.

THE COURTYARD GARDENS OF THE ALHAMBRA: A BARZAKHIAN

APPROACH

The etymological analysis of the Arabic word for landscape has shown us the importance of vision and contemplation in understanding the garden. Vision

⁶⁸ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 181,162. (II 184.7).It is also interesting to note that gardens features prominently in Ibn al-Arabi’s biography. In one instance he mentions spiritual blessings referred to him in a garden and on the other he mentioned that he had a dream about the Spiritual Pole of Islam and met him the following day in a garden. It was also in a garden that he heard a voice telling him of the death of a close companion. See Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn Arabi* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999), 178, 113,190. See also Claude Addas *The Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn Arabi*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge, Mass.: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993). Throughout this account on Ibn al-Arabi’s life, Addas gives wonderful quotations from Ibn al-Arabi’s accounts describing gardens and countryside where he grew up and travelled through, clearly signifying the value of these aesthetics to him.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 181.

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and contemplation play a major role in Ibn al-Arabi's teachings of the *barzakh* as a space of the imagination.

We say the world is two worlds and the presence two presences, even though a third presence is born between the two from their combination. The one presence is the Presence of the Unseen; it has a world called the World of the Unseen. The second presence is the Presence of Sense Perception and of the Visible; its world is called the World of the Visible. That which perceives this world is sight, while that which perceives the World of the Unseen is insight.

What is born from a combination of these two presences is a presence and a world. The presence is the Presence of the Imagination, the world the World of the Imagination. Imagination is the manifestation of meanings in sensory frames.

That is why the Presence of the Imagination is the vastest of presences: it combines the two worlds, the World of the Unseen and the World of the Visible. For the Presence of the Unseen does not embrace the World of the Visible, since no empty space remains in the former; and the same goes for the Presence of the Visible. Hence you know that the Presence of Imagination is the vastest, without doubt.⁷⁰

My analysis of the Arabic word for landscape has also revealed the important link between garden, vision, contemplation and beauty. For Ibn al-Arabi the world is made up by signs, which come from the Real, which is beautiful and loves beauty.⁷¹ This makes beauty inherent in the world. By turning our gaze towards these signs we will be able to penetrate their meanings and see beauty, but only when we look at the world with two eyes, reason and imagination. He explains:

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Arabi, *The Meccan Revelation*, Vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 171.

⁷¹ Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God*, 435. —“God is beautiful and He loves beauty.”

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The only reason God multiplied the signs in the world and in ourselves—for we are part of the world—was so that we might turn our gaze (*nazar*) toward it with remembrance, reflection, intelligence, faith, knowledge, hearing, sight, understanding, and mind. He created us only to worship Him. Hence He turned us over to nothing but gazing upon the world, for He made it identical with the signs and denotations of the knowledge of Him through contemplation (*mushâhada*) and intelligence.⁷²

Every locus has a beauty that is specific to it and belongs to nothing else. God gazes upon the cosmos only after beautifying and proportioning it so that it will receive what He brings to it in His self-disclosure in the measure of the beauty of its preparedness. The self-disclosure drapes it in beauty upon beauty, so it remains forever in a new beauty in each self-disclosure, just as in itself it remains forever in a new creation. So transmutation belongs to it perpetually in its nonmanifest and manifest domains—whenever God unveils for someone the covering of his blindness from his insight. (IV 145.27)⁷³

I have argued that the courtyard gardens exist within frameworks by which their architectural shapes take on specific meanings. These frameworks are founded upon a particular cosmology, theology and imaginary, which all speak to some primordial narrative. However, this narrative is deeply rooted in an Islamic historical and cultural milieu. The forms of the courtyard are the visible signs or images of those meanings and values that exist within the mind of the beholder. Interpreting these signs or forms entails a hermeneutical process, which, according to Ibn al-Arabi, involves seeing both the —seen” world of abstract meanings together with the —sen” world of sensible forms. Linking these two worlds and giving existence to both is

⁷² Ibn al-Arabi, —owards Sainthood: States and Stations,” *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 182-183.

⁷³ Ibn al-Arabi, —owards Sainthood: States and Stations,” 182-183. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 80.

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the *barzakh*, the intermediary world of the imagination (*alam al-khayāl*), which in Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts are among the most beautiful in entity and the most perfect in gendered existence."⁷⁴

Primary value is placed on the immediate, direct and intuitive experience of the sensible world and apprehending its underlying meaning through its forms. The courtyard garden's spatial arrangement exhibits a spatial sensitivity focused on a centrifugal organization of space. In Ibn al-Arabi's words:

No line becomes manifest from the Center without coming to an end at the Circumference, and no line becomes manifest on the inner side of the Circumference without coming to an end at the center. These lines are nothing but the world.

The Void' is that which is postulate between the Center and the Circumference. It fills the world with its entity and engendered existence. Within it become manifests transmutations, from Center to Circumference and from Circumference to Center. . . . So His Circumference is His Names, while His Center is Essence. That is why He is the One/Number and the One/Many. No eye looks upon Him except the eye of man (*ayn al-insân*), and were it not for the man of the eye (*Insân al-ayan*) [i.e., the pupil], the eye of man would not gaze.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ James W. Morris, —Dine Imagination' and the Intermediate World: Ibn Arabi on the *Barzakh*," <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/> (accessed May 31, 2010) explains that the Arabic word *al-khayāl* would normally refer to an "image" or "object of imagination" and ultimately to its concrete fundamental reality. Ibn al-Arabi uses the word to mean mirror images, shadows and in this sense it is synonymous with the word *mithāl*, which root meaning is to resemble, to look alike, to imitate and to appear in the likeness of. Ibn al-Arabi uses this terminology to stress that an image brings two sides together and unites them as one, both the same and different from the two sides. An image is similar to the mirror, as a mirror is both the mirror and the object it reflects or it is neither the mirror nor the object. See also Ibn al-Arabi, —Towards Sainthood: States and Stations," 185 and especially note 143 on p. 310-311.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-Arabi, —Towards Sainthood: States and Stations," 188. Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 82. See also Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 227-232. Note here Ibn al-Arabi's play on the word *insân*, making the meaning clear that it means both human as well as pupil, in essence pointing to the fact that inner vision is only possible

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In the gardens of the Alhambra vision becomes an essential aspect of the experience of the garden. There is a continuous interplay between what the eye really sees and what is implied. D. Fairchild Ruggles claims that in an Islamic framework the tension between the promise of a visual experience and the actual fulfilment of such an experience is orchestrated by devices such as screens and miradors. These devices momentarily limit vision and force a person to step forward and train the eyes along a straight line before making a visual sweep from side to side. Vision is enhanced by movement as a person's eye experiences, in an instant, what the body must negotiate through time and space. Even more, through the placement of architecture in landscape, not only is a view of nature emphasised, but it becomes a view from a specific location. These structures fix the direction of the gaze, while simultaneously dictating what is seen by making their locus invariably an intersection of two crossed axes or one of the axis's terminal points.

Miradors:

Miradors are usually situated in an elevated position, directing the eye's gaze downwards into the garden, as if looking down onto a carpet, or outwards to take in the extent of the landscape. These views are charged with meaning,

by a fully embodied human being, thus effectively merging body and spirit. See also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 385, Note 10. For a discussion of the word *ayn*, which in its technical sense means "entity," that which sets something apart from another thing, see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 83, 84. Non-technical it can mean "eye" or "identical with." Thus, when used by Ibn al-Arabi, "entity" is on one hand, the possible things as they exist in the cosmos, and on the other hand, the possible things nonexistent in the cosmos but existent in God's knowledge." It is only the complete human being that can see both together because such a being is a *harzakh* between the Real and the cosmos, a raised up-mirror. The real sees His form in the mirror of the human being, and creation also sees its form in him." (III 397. 3) Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 249. See also Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 81-83.

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since vision becomes a tightly controlled experience where two layers, the “real” and the “constructed,” are collapsed into one another. The mirador has a dual function as it not only provides a place for viewing, but it simultaneously enables the very act of vision.”⁷⁶ In this process a place or person is established as the subject or viewer and the other as the object viewed. In this distinction between subject and object, through a disciplining act of perception, the frame creates a relationship in which subject and object are mutually dependent upon one another.

For the extent of my argument, it is also important to notice that miradors do not only play an important role in focussing the gaze, but can also be considered intermediary structures bringing together in one sweeping view the outside landscape and the inside courtyard. James Dickie claims miradors are orchestrated as such that they become the space where the architecture reaches a climax in the landscape. Tension follows release with both views being seen together simultaneously.⁷⁷

In the frame of the mirador, landscape and gardens were laid out as representations of nature; the fact that real trees, shrubs, and plants were displayed made the entire representation (including the limits set by the frame) real and natural.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 107, 108.

⁷⁷ James Dickie, “Space and Volume in Nasrid Architecture,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain (Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte)*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 624.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 107, 108. Ruggles claims that perception is guided by a sharply focussed lens objectifying the garden and the landscape as well as signifying its owner. In Ruggles’ opinion miradors not only represent the landscape, they stage-manage human vision to enforce a worldview of the sultan as creator of his earthly domain and representative of God on earth.

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Fig. 1

Water:

In Ibn al-Arabi's cosmology, water is very important and considered as one of the four pillars or four elements of nature: earth, water, air and fire.

Earth is acted upon by water, which is acted upon by air. . . . Air brings together heat and wetness. From heat becomes manifest the pillar fire, and from wetness the pillar water. From the solidity of water earth comes to be. Thus air is the son of the Breath, which is the Cloud; fire and water are the two children of air, and earth is the child of the child. It is the water that becomes solidified. That which does not become solidified remains as water in its root and earth is upon that water. . . . After all, air makes water flow when it moves. But when it is held back and is still the

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water on it stays still. . . . This is a form that pervades the whole cosmos.
(III 458.10)⁷⁹

However, Ibn al-Arabi also refers to water in a metaphorical way as a symbol that can aid in a person's understanding of the true forms inherited in the cosmos. In Ibn al-Arabi's opinion forms are ~~like~~ a mirage you see as a garden. You think it is water. And you come to the water's source so as not to lose it. Consider, and realize what you see, for there may be deceit!⁸⁰ Chittick explains that for Ibn al-Arabi —Being can manifest itself through the form of any possible thing, just as water, upon which the Throne of God is placed (Qur'an 11:7) can take the shape of any receptacle."⁸¹ On another occasion, Chittick points out that Ibn al-Arabi often compares the relation between Being or *wujūd* and the entities or forms to that between water and ice.⁸²

Especially relevant to our arguments concerning the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra is Ibn al-Arabi's use of the analogy of a pool of water to explain that forms are sometimes distorted and need interpretation to be recognised and understood. He describes the depth of the pool as the storehouse of the imagination; the pool is the natural body wherein the pure and lustrous water of the spirit has become turbid, making it difficult to discern the truth. Only by means of interpretation (*ta'bīr*) can a person cross over (*ḡubūr*) from the turbid water to the undefiled source."⁸³

⁷⁹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 300.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 96.

⁸² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 34.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 347.

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Fig.2

The pool' is the waystation where
water is described as turbid,
and these are the knowledges
specific to mortal man.

In its own entity
the water is limpid, not turbid,
but its depth makes manifest
the turbidity within it.

The cause of its rolling
is the reflection it stirs up.
So seek from knowledge
what rises beyond reflection!

The occasion of the manifestation of turbidities is the settling down and stillness of the water. It seeks ease from moving in other than movement's site and locus. We referred to this state with the word pool, because water of a pool is settled and still. (II 594.22 595.33)⁸⁴

Water introduces either movement or stasis into the garden. On the one hand, the pools in the gardens, in their stillness, reveal hidden depths, which

⁸⁴ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 347-349.

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one can only pierce by means of the imagination. On the other hand, movement reveals new realities, for just as shapes change in a mirror when a person perceives it from a different position, moving water changes what is perceived. Ibn al-Arabi explains:

[Water's] shapes change with the change in the shape of the polished object. When it is wavy, they are wavy. When the thing whose form they are moves in the outside world, they remain still unless the shiny object is moved. For example, when water is wavy, the eye sees the form moving, even though the object whose form it is remains still. (III 214.9)⁸⁵

Entering the Court of Myrtles and the Court of Lions the beholder of these courtyard gardens becomes aware of an interrelationship between artificial and natural elements that relate the architecture to the landscape. In both courtyards natural elements such as water simultaneously deceive and reveal, fusing the link between interior and exterior spaces, as well as between positive and negative space.

The court of the Court of Myrtles is almost completely taken up by a large rectangular pool, measuring 36.6 by 23.5 meters. A thin row of myrtle shrubs runs along the east and west side of the pool. These thin beds of vegetation are framed by narrow channels of water sunken into the marble pavement. On either end of the pool there is a small basin from which the water spouts gently upwards to fall back into the basin in order to dribble along short open channels into the main pool. Ruggles explains that the brief vertical axes of the bubbling jets stand in contrast with the horizontal sheet of silvery water on which the surrounding architecture is mirrored, which adds dynamism to

⁸⁵ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 110

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an otherwise composed environment. This play of movement and stasis is also carried over into the forms of the courtyard. The circular shapes of the basins form a contrast to the severe rectangularity of the larger pool and the linear shrubbery of the beds. Looking past the physical form, the basin could be perceived as imitating the undulating ring of a water drop when it falls onto a smooth surface and then radiates outward in gentle ripples.⁸⁶

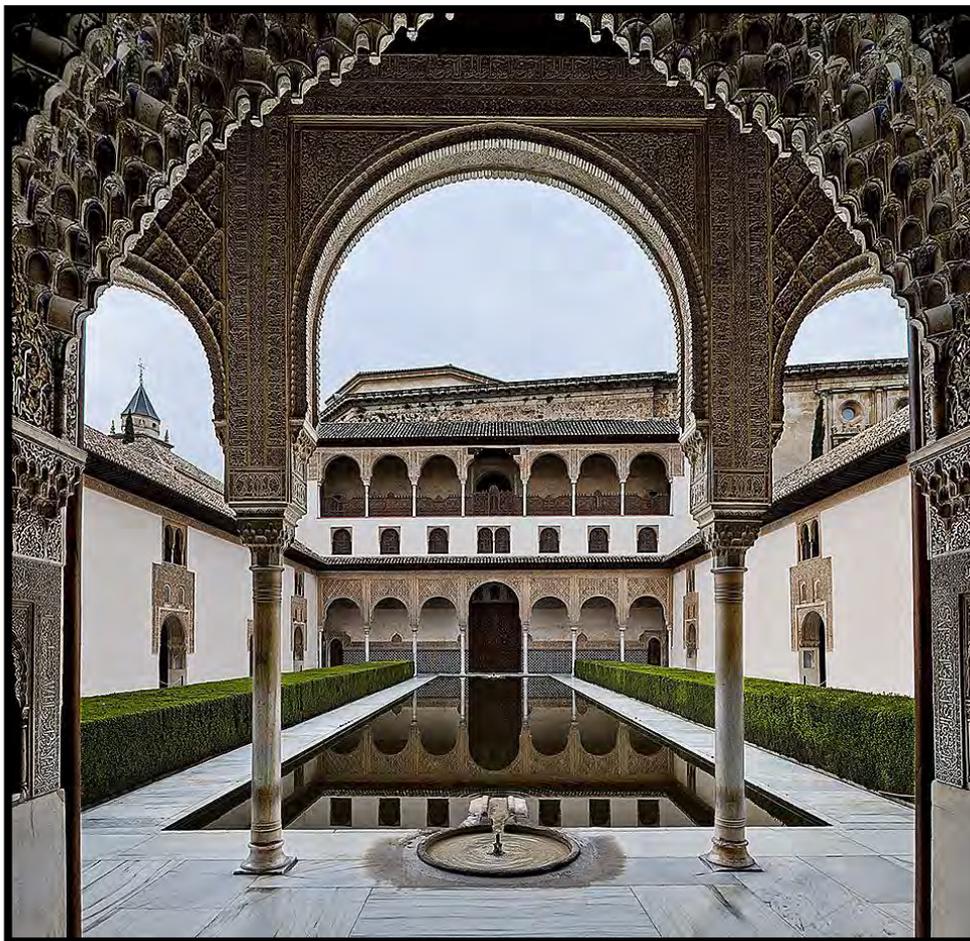


Fig. 3

The northern side of the courtyard is, according to Grabar, the courtyard's most celebrated facade. He describes it as follows:

⁸⁶ Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 182-187.

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In elevation it consists of an open portico with a small central cupola, a long hall with corner towers, and finally the huge mass of the Comares Tower. Whether seen as a descending composition, from the defensive crenellation of the top of the tower to the frail columns below, or as an ascending one, from the carefully carved arches below to the raw masonry above, it is a highly thought-out architectonic ensemble.⁸⁷

Not only is the eye drawn upwards by the building to take in the open sky, it is simultaneously also drawn downwards to the centre, where the pool with its mirror surface becomes a mirage of form and image.

Juxtaposed to the stillness and calm engendered by the Court Of Myrtles, the Court of Lions brings a sense of movement and action to the experience. The rectangular courtyard contains a garden divided axially by paved walkways into four equal quadrants.⁸⁸ Surrounding the garden is an arcade whose floor level is slightly higher than the garden paths, with projecting kiosks at the east and west ends of the courtyard. The movement of water from inside the surrounding chambers to the centre of the courtyard, which Ruggles describes as “liquid ribbons of water,” succeeds in bringing contrasting spaces together, whereby the “one” and “the many” is brought together in a single fluid movement.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 61. See also Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, 116 for their description of the Court of Myrtles, focusing on the polarizing of sky and horizon in the reflection of the pool, they also point out a series of polarities found in the architectural ensemble, which for them eventually points to a programmatic duality of social space and emblem.

⁸⁸ Ruggles, *Islamic Gardens and Landscape*, 48. Cynthia Robinson, “Marginal Ornament: Poetics, Mimesis, and Devotion in the Palace of Lions,” in *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World: Frontiers of Islamic Art and Architecture: Essays in Celebration of Oleg Grabar’s Eightieth Birthday*, eds. Gülru Necipoğlu and Julia Bailey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 195. Aben and De Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, 118, 119.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 48. 193.

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Important to note is that Ruggles also offers a secular reading of the Court of Lions as a place of power. Ruggles argues that the quadripartite plan of the garden is a powerful symbol of sovereignty and that the lions are an age old symbol of might. At the Alhambra, these features may refer to the patron's stewardship of the land as he is also the controller of the water sources. Similar to her arguments concerning the Lindaraja mirador as a symbolic device to focus on sovereignty, Ruggles claims that the cross-axial garden of the Lion's court is a powerful symbol of territory, possession and sovereign rule. It serves as a metaphor for the organization and possession of the land.⁹⁰

In contrast to this interpretation of the power and sovereignty of the physical gardens, Cynthia Robinson concentrates on their poetry and ornament. Robinson argues that the poetry, ornament and architecture of the Alhambra should be interpreted symbolically and as such the Palace of Lions regarded as embodying a lush garden. Robinson claims when the architecture is understood in terms of allegory and mimeses, it becomes clear the designers intended the space to be a cosmos-garden and that the Nasrid public understood these elements. Structurally, the Lions courtyard lies between the small garden on which the Lindaraja Mirador opens and the *Rawdah*, south of the Palace (where the Nasrid sovereigns were buried), forming a link between these "real" gardens, but also giving it a metaphysical connotation by embodying concepts such as divinely granted sovereignty and the afterlife.

⁹⁰ Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 48.

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Focusing on the forms of the courtyard gardens, Aben and De Wit claim the patio of the Court of Lions has a complex symbolism, whereby the axial cross is as much a representation of the cosmos as a referent to agriculture, whereby the irrigation symbolises the prosperity of the land and the control of nature. The lions of the fountain represent the victor in whose honour the patio was built and the technical ingenuity of its makers.

However, it is Nasser Rabbat who captures the essence of the courtyard of the Lions as his description brings to the fore the close connection between the moving water and the presence it achieves as being simultaneously moving inward to the —solū of the courtyard and outward to that which lies beyond. Rabbat emphasises the role of the water in contemplation, stating that the prime metaphor of these courtyard gardens' use of water is the visual confusion between liquid and solid. This confusion stresses the contemplative function of the water features. Only by piercing the veils of these paradoxes will a person be able to recognise the ultimate beauty displayed by the sculpting of the water.⁹¹ In the Court of Lions the overall symmetrical balance of the courtyard is carried through onto the water channels. The north-south axis comes to an end in fountains inside the two halls, while the longer east-west axis does not penetrate the interiors, but stops short; creating an equal sided-cross. Balance, however, is also maintained by the placement of the two identical sunken fountains at the end of the eastern and western porticos. Water is surging over the sides of these

⁹¹ Nasser Rabbat, "The Palace of the Lions, Alhambra and the Role of Water in its Conception," *Environmental Design: Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Centre* 2 (1985): 70. http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document_id=4860

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small, depressed bowls before flowing back and cascading over carved stone steps to finally spill into the dodecagonal basin at the base of the twelve lions. Not only is the physical continuity of the axes maintained by these unbroken channels, but the inward orientation towards the fountain at the centre is highlighted by the direction of the centripetal water flow. The fountain reverses the water flow as there are two pierced round holes in the lower cylindrical structure of the bowl's centre with water spilling out of eight smaller outlets onto the surface of the bowl to be captured by these two larger holes. Through this configuration a continuous back and forth movement on the water's surface is created, broken only by the jet of water spurting from the centre. Finally, to complete this symphony of water are the twelve liquid arches of spraying water erupting from the mouths of the lions to fall in the basin at their feet.⁹² The overall impression created by the lion's fountain accentuates the centrifugal flow of the water, calling attention to the uninterrupted flow of the water moving towards the centre, while simultaneously also moving away from the centre.

Furthermore, this linear arrangement of the water channels becomes part of a successive arrangement of space, starting with the alignment of the Fountain of the Hall of Abencerrages, the Fountain of the Lions, the Hall of the Two Sisters and the Fountain of Lindaraja. The Lindaraja Mirador becomes the essential link between the courtyards, the Garden of Lindaraja and the landscape beyond. It functions as a threshold bringing together

⁹² Rabbat, "The Palace of the Lions, Alhambra and the Role of Water in its Conception," 65.

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inside and outside, while simultaneously making evident the separation of palace from surrounding landscape.

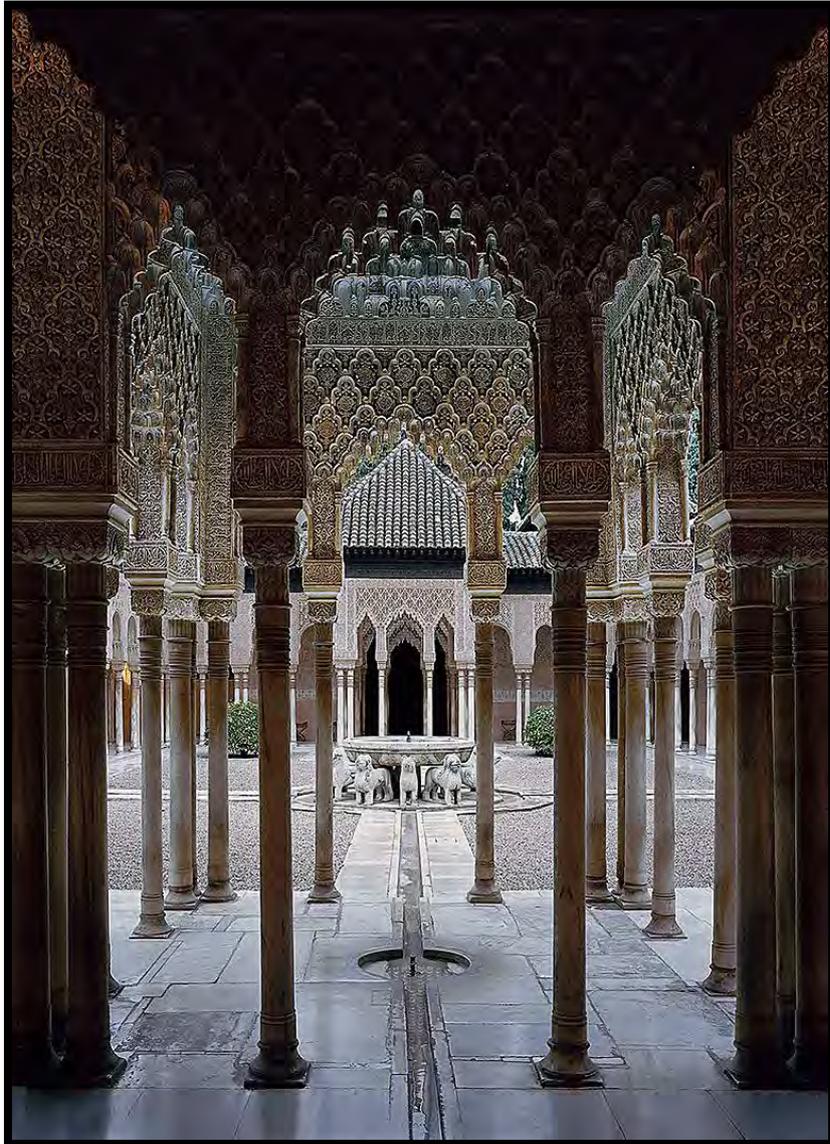


Fig.4

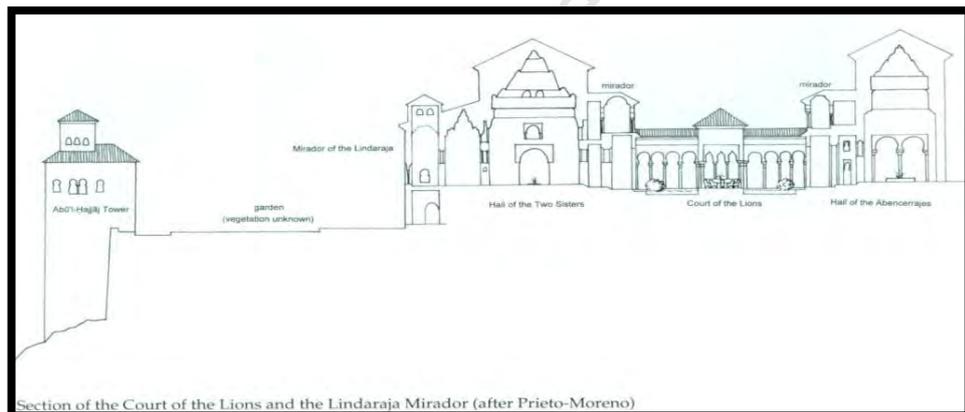
In her discussion of the Lindaraja Mirador, Ruggles draws attention to a poem of Ibn Zamrak that adorns the walls of the Lindaraja Mirador.

Surely I am in this garden an eye filled with joy and the pupil of the eye is veritably my Lord.⁹³

⁹³ Robert Irwin, *The Alhambra*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004),

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Pointing to the play of the word „*ain*, which has the double meaning of —*ey*” and —*spring*” and is coupled with *insān* (pupil) in the poem, Ruggles explains that this poem confirms the mirador’s function as a device that establishes a structural relationship between object and subject as it positions the viewer and frames the view.⁹⁴ Furthermore, what makes the view from this mirador inwards towards the Court of Lions and outwards beyond the walls of the palace-city towards the distant mountains even more dramatic and unexpected is the fact that the Court of Lions is not perched on the palace-city’s perimeter walls, but lies well inside it.



Section of the Court of the Lions and the Lindaraja Mirador (after Prieto-Moreno)

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Aben and De Wit state the patio is both the —*sum*” of the cultivated landscape and place from which to survey the domain.” Furthermore, they claim the landscape is present in the courtyard as —*prospect* and emblem.”⁹⁶ Meaning, form, geometry and detail come together in a balanced composition in which building and patio and patio and landscape, thus inside and outside,

⁹⁴ Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 201. Ruggles also refers to the function the mirador serves in asserting power relations. The mirador places the ruler in front of the mirador surveying his kingdom. See also Irwin, *The Alhambra*, 55, 56, where he states that this poem is a typical example of Ibn Zamrak’s use of poetry as a vehicle for boasting and flattery. See also note 71.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁶ Aben and De Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, 119.

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are visible at the same time. Drama is offered by the view from the mirador, one of contained domestic space and the other of the exterior landscape.

One was the slowly unfolding spectacle of landscape that changes from winter's snow-capped mountains to the fresh green of spring and summer's yellow maturity. The other was the more self-consciously staged theatre of the courtyard garden, where the delight taken by medieval Andalusians in metaphor and paradox is fully evident.⁹⁷

Although the Court of Lions exhibits a typology central to fourteenth-century Islamic palace architecture in its quadripartite divided garden with central fountain, these spaces, when looked at through the interpretative lens of Ibn al-Arabi, leads the perceiver onto an experiential journey of contemplation and revelation. Firstly, there is an integration of exterior and interior spaces, creating a third space in which the distinction between outside and inside disappears. Secondly, this juxtaposition of inside and outside is further enhanced by the play of water and form. Ibn al-Arabi describes one of his own states of attaining knowledge in these terms:

I was made to see the similitude of water in a river within which no form was distinct. The water was itself, nothing else. Then some of the water was put into containers. Thereby the water of a jar became designated as different from the water of a pot, and the water of a pot as different from the water of a jug. The shape and color of the receptacle became manifest in the water, The receptacles exercised their properties over the water by dividing and shaping it, even though you know that something that did not become manifest as a shape when it was in the river was exactly the same as something that became manifest when it was not in the river. (III 187. 31)⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 209, 210.

⁹⁸ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 352.

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In a similar sense, it can be argued that although a person is aware that the water in the fountains and pools of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra is merely water, the perception of these fountains and pools give a different quality to the water. The reflection of the Comares Tower in the still, rectangular pool creates a “majestic sense of hushed stasis” as the tower becomes a shimmering water image. Paradoxically, in the Court of Lions movement is not only suggested by the use of water features, but practically imposed upon the perceiver through the placement of the slender and graceful columns.⁹⁹

Furthermore, Robinson claims the reflection of images in the water engenders a state of “bewitchment” of the senses, which takes a person beyond the opposition between what is real and what is not. Similarly, stressing the importance of water in stimulating the senses and the mind, Ruggles points out that the water features in the Court of Myrtles provide illusionary reflections of the surrounding architecture, but when they are propelled in jets and channels they “animate an otherwise inert environment.” Water is also used to achieve the common illusion of the “dematerialization of a material object” by offering, according to Ruggles, not only entertainment, but “may have been read on a variety of other levels, speaking to a highly cultivated audience accustomed to simile and metaphor in which nothing is quite what it seems.”¹⁰⁰ These spaces can be perceived as nothing more than imagination and thus, when people turned their gaze towards it with

⁹⁹ Robinson, “Marginal Ornament,” 187.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 185. Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 210.

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remembrance, reflection, intelligence, faith, knowledge, hearing and sight they could gain insight and perceive a world.

Light:

Moving through the spaces of the courtyard garden, forms and patterns are emphasised or muted by patterns of light and shadow and openness and enclosure. This effect merges the visible and invisible line between dark and light and open and closed, intimating the *barzakh*-like nature of the space.

The Real is sheer Light, while the impossible is sheer darkness. Darkness never turns into light, nor does light turn into darkness. Creation is the *Barzakh* between Light and darkness. In its essence it is qualified neither by darkness nor by light, since it is the *Barzakh* and the Middle which has a property of each of its two sides. That is why He appointed for man two eyes and guided him on the two highways, since he exists between the two paths. Through one eye and one path he accepts the light and looks upon it in the measure of his preparedness. Through the other eye and the other path he looks upon darkness and turns toward it. (F. III 274.28)¹⁰¹

Seeing the light and shadow through both eyes implies a subjective experience (beholder) as well as an objective phenomenon (light and shadow). All knowledge, perceptual, contemplative and intuitive, is realised through imagination, which acts as the intermediary between sensation and the mind. As intermediary it gives existence to forms, but true knowledge only comes when a person realises with her/his mind the non-manifested potentiality of all forms already existent in Absolute Reality. It is to recognise the truth in all the signs and forms of the cosmos by means of interpretation.

¹⁰¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 362.

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Thus, on the one hand, it is to experience the truth in beauty, and on the other to know that beauty is truth. For Ibn al-Arabi, this knowledge comes through light, as the Real is Light, the Unreal darkness and the cosmos as existing between the two, a realm of brightness and shadow. Ibn al-Arabi explains:

Light is perceived, and through it perception takes place. Darkness is perceived, but through it no perception takes place. . . . God is sheer Light, while the impossible is sheer darkness. . . . Creation is the *Barzakh* between Light and darkness. . . . The dark and luminous veils through which the Real is veiled from the cosmos are the light and the darkness by which the possible thing becomes qualified in its reality because it is an intermediary. (F. III 274.25, 276.9, 18)¹⁰²

As Chittick states, light, just as *wujūd* or Being, is both epistemological and ontological. Light is being, finding and manifestation, but it is also knowledge. Through the attainment of this knowledge a person can penetrate the essence of existence and realise that all existence is a self-disclosure of the Real. Ibn al-Arabi claims that through this self-disclosure there is —*entrance* and exit, descent and ascent, motion and stillness, joining and separation, infringement and that which stays in place.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, the cosmos, or this self-disclosure, is nothing but imagination, as it is imagination that perceives and interprets the forms and gives them existence.

In the same way imagination gains possession of the degree of sense perception and meaning. Hence it makes the sensory thing subtle and the meaning gross, thus possessing complete power. . . . Were it not in the middle, it could not exercise its properties over the two sides, since it

¹⁰² Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 214.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 214, 215.

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is a limit for them, just as the present moment entifies (*ta'yin*) the past and the future.¹⁰⁴

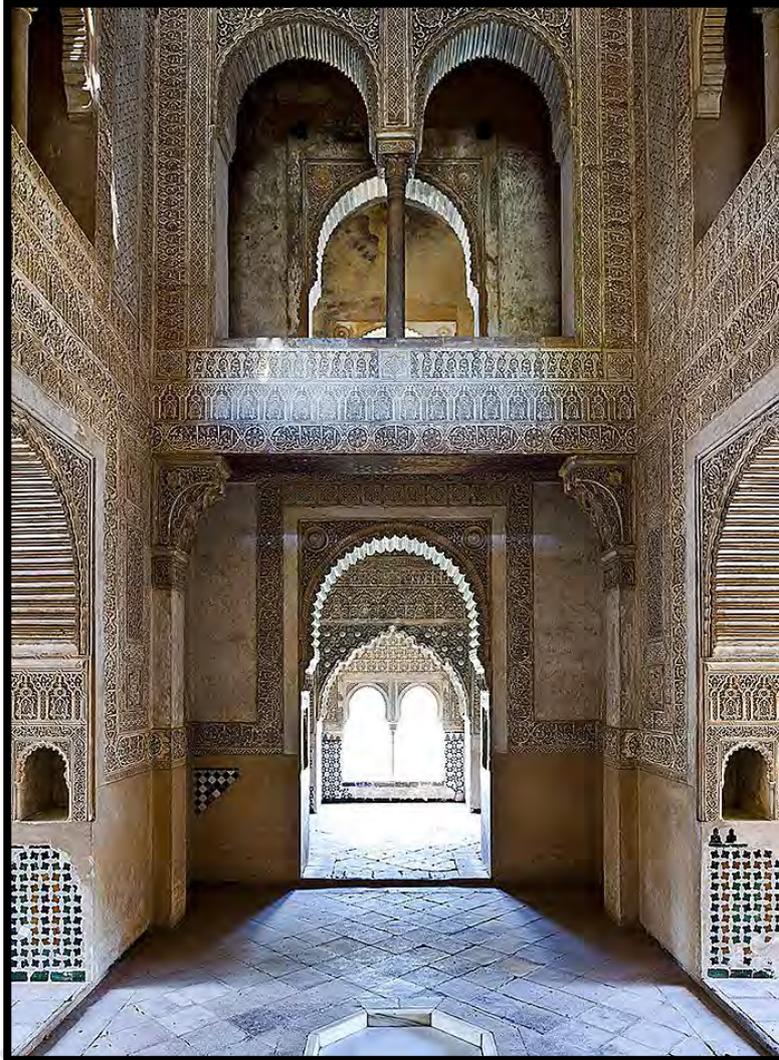


Fig. 5

The courtyard garden as a *barzakh* mirrors and reflects the landscape, but it also mirrors and reflects that which is only visible in the spaces of the imagination. Its architectural form is able to engender, through sense-perception, reflection, imagination, memory and reason, a space that can be shaped to have individual meaning.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn al-Arabi, —Towards Sainthood: States and Stations,” 187.

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Look at the form manifest to the eye in a polished surface and verify your vision. You will find that the form has come between you and your perception of the polished surface, which is the locus of disclosure. So you will never see the surface. The Real is the locus of disclosure for the forms of the possible things. Hence the cosmos sees only the cosmos in the Real.

The object of vision, which is the Real, is Light, while that through which the perceiver perceives Him is light. Hence light becomes included in light. . . . You, in respect of your entity, are identical with shadow, not light. Light is that through which you perceive all things, and light is one of the things. So you perceive light only as much as you carry light in your shadow itself. (F. III 116.18)¹⁰⁵

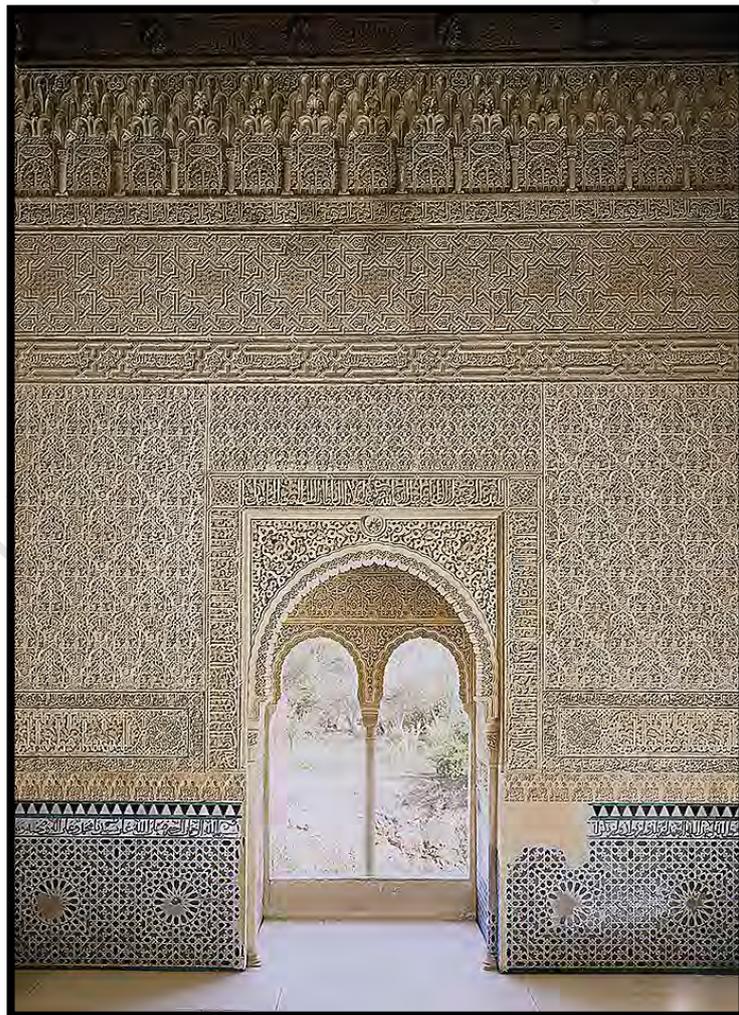


Fig.6

¹⁰⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 215.

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The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra encapsulate Ibn al-Arabi's teachings, focussed on the perception of beauty as also being the perception of truth. For Beauty, in the eyes of Ibn al-Arabi, affirms the "identity of all existence with Being" just as "light erases darkness . . . and nearness negates distance."¹⁰⁶ Beauty becomes an expression of the creativity found in the world and in the space of the courtyard garden it is captured and expressed through the interplay of light and shadow creating patterns and texture on the surfaces of the highly decorated pillars, screens and *muqarnas* domes.

Screens:

Robert Irwin commented on the fact that the builders of the Alhambra worked as much with light and shadow as they did with wood and stone. Screens were used as filters and gilded surfaces as reflectors.¹⁰⁷

Dickie explains that the architectural screens used in the architecture of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra are porous to a greater or lesser degree, which interrupts the axial progression with a series of receding planes, the arches being composed of a diaphanous, transparent screen and the walls with an opaque screen. The transparent screen precedes the opaque screen whose opacity is also never total as it is always pierced with an archway or more than one archway. He continues that in the Alhambra these screens define two different kinds of space, longitudinal space and transversal space,

¹⁰⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 24.

¹⁰⁷ Irwin, *The Alhambra*, 127. Although Irwin points out the logical use of sunlight as brightening the spaces he also mentions the fact that it is worthwhile to consider the "mysticism of light," which are based on a mystical reading of certain texts of the Quran and Sufi literature, as well as the metaphorical role the Sultan plays as a symbol of light-the Sultan as the sun in the his court's cosmos.

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with sharply contrasted zones which become part of the drama. Perspective is altered with the spectator's position, whereby intersecting vistas are produced which open and close as a person moves through the space.



Fig. 7

Dickie points out that this differentiation of space by means of screens, which interrupt and punctuate direction, breaks up the space into apprehensible units, but it also heightens a sense of awe as a person moves through them. The arcades in the courtyard of the Lions form a porous screen whereby light

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is filtered through the spaces binding and unifying its disparate elements in a complex unity of form and texture.



Fig. 8

The function of the pattern, whether it is stuccowork, honeycombing or tiling, is to engage and trap the eye. In this process of entrapment the decoration engages the visitor as a person becomes absorbed in the act of tracing a pattern or deciphering a design.¹⁰⁸ The visitor, thus, participates in the architecture by which a distinct set of relationships between the exterior and the interior and between both, the interior and the exterior, and the observer are established.

¹⁰⁸ Dickie, "Space and Volume in Nasrid Architecture," 622-624. See also Grabar, *The Alhambra*, 159-210, Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 209 and Robinson, "Marginal Ornament," 185-199, all who stress the importance of the poetical inscriptions in the Palaces of the Alhambra for understanding the overall meaning of the Palaces, themselves. Ruggles claims that both the poetry and the architecture address the viewer and as such enter into a relationship with the viewer. Robinson stresses the importance of a poetics of mimesis and allegory to create an experience of amazement and surprise, which in turn will produce pleasure and delight.

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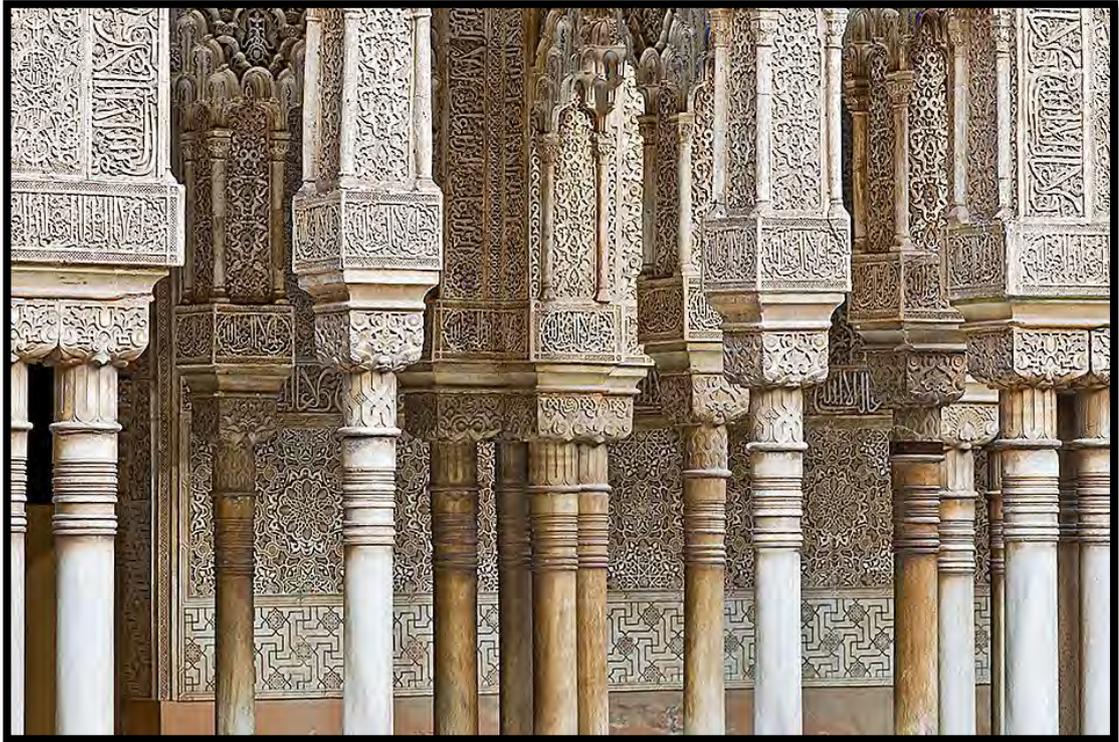


Fig. 9

The importance of light in the architectural space of the courtyard becomes clear as the sun moves across the sky. The solidness of the architecture seems to become less stable with the movement of the sun as light becomes trapped and fractured by the prismatic medium of *muqarnas*. Dickie explains that in Nasrid architecture the “angle of light is always oblique.” With the movement of the sun around the sky patterns or parts of a pattern are highlighted on the opposite wall. Furthermore, the detail would be alternately dormant or vibrant depending on the clouds obscuring the sun. The result was that the architecture was never for a moment static but always unstable, thus the function of light or filtered light was to “enrich an otherwise static

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mass.”¹⁰⁹ Light and water played a similar role as they enhanced an otherwise stationary space with movement.

Screens are used to filter the light and *muqarnas* to fracture light, whereby —highlighted surfaces and shadowed concavities break up the space.” Both elements delimit and at the same time link the spaces around them, resulting in the merging of interior and exterior space whereby all distinctions between these spaces become vague. It can be argued that this interpenetration of inside and outside creates a third space, which is perceived as simultaneously real and not real. In this process volume disintegrates and then —integrates as spirit becomes matter and matter assumes form in its descent into phenomenality. . . . Matter is not as solid or static but as fluid and kinetic.”¹¹⁰ According to Grabar, the overall objective of these courtyard spaces is to provide illusions in a constant attempt to give an impression that things are not what they seem to be. Light becomes a major player in heightening these impressions, especially evident in the unusual rhythm of the light sources in the Court of Lions which succeeds in creating two opposite but equal perceptions, space becomes at one and the same time positive and negative.

A north-south section shows a central source in the court itself, and then areas of chiaroscuro and darkness until secondary sources provided by the base of the main domes and by the Mirador de la Daraxa introduce more subdued beams into the building. But it is not simply a question of contrasts during daylight; the monument is so composed that at night,

¹⁰⁹ Dickie, “Space and Volume in Nasrid Architecture,” 625. See also Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, 193.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 625.

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when light comes from the covered halls and darkness reigns outside, it becomes visible and perceptible as the exact negative of its positive reality during the day.¹¹¹

The composition of the Court of Lions unifies open and closed spaces with water channels, fountains, architecture and ornament. Although it can be argued that these elements, together or alone, may have specific secular or religious meanings according to their specific typology, or a specific iconography, as Grabar argues, in these courtyards they create the illusion of a single space through which there is an uninterrupted progression of a display of light.



Fig. 10

¹¹¹ Grabar, *The Alhambra*, 164,185

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CONCLUSION: GARDENS OF THE IMAGINATION

Jerrilynn Dodds argues that in the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra there is a constant fluctuation between interior and exterior experiences. This subtle sensation of disorientation that comes from these architectural spaces is constantly undermining the viewer's logical expectations. According to Dodds, these principles privileging this sense of ambiguity became part of the overall search for beauty. Both the concealed and the visible revealed their full power only after considerable meditation and even then it was not always understandable in its full complexity. The palace goers of the Alhambra were part of cultural group whose cosmic view sought solace in a higher order.¹¹²

Akkach interprets Ibn al-Arabī's imagination as fusing and merging the creative capacity of the human being. Imagination is seen to mediate both symbolic representation and analogical reasoning by bringing sensory forms and abstract concepts together in a meaningful relationship. Not only is it an essential cognitive instrument, but it is also the creative cause of all existence. Here the creative nature of the human imagination becomes the capacity to deal with and to manipulate abstracted form in whichever way a person wishes. This creative capacity has the ability to deconstruct any available form and reconstruct new and unfamiliar forms embodied with meanings.

This action does not stand in isolation from the senses, as individual imagination is inextricably bound to the sensory world, for all elementary data

¹¹² Jerrilynn D. Dodds, "The Arts of al-Andalus," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain (Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte,)* ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 616-618.

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that fills our imagination are extracted by the senses through contact with the phenomenal world. Imagination, in Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts, has no power to create *ex nihilo*. Therefore, the created object always exists in relation to the subject; it has been presupposed in the perceptual experience of the subject. As a result, it can be argued architectural forms are not only aesthetic but also metaphorical, as they have external and internal meaning. There is a relationship between architectural form, textual exegesis and being in the world.¹¹³

The courtyard garden stands in relationship with its interpreter and within its spaces it gathers together form, beauty and imagination to create an aesthetic mode of experiencing, perceiving and living in the world. The very essence of the courtyard garden is its ability to simultaneously reveal and to conceal. It needs to be interpreted, whereby a person moves from the obvious external meaning towards a more internal and hidden meaning. For Ibn al-Arabi, the garden is ultimately a place of the imagination; it simultaneously veils and unveils; it is shadow and light; and it allows a

¹¹³ Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, 40-41. See also Richard B. Pilgrim, "Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Tradition in Japan" in *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: Anthology in Religion and Art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Continuum, 1984), 138-154. In his discussion of a religious-aesthetic tradition in Japan, Pilgrim quotes Kisho Kurokawa's discussion of "gray space" and his example of the walkway or porch as an expression of "gray space." The experience of such a "gray space" places primary value on an immediate, direct, intuitive aesthetic experience of the world in its multiplicity and a knowing of the world in its sacred unity. Direct experience does not stop the flow of reality; neither does it distance the experiencing subject from the object. It is, therefore, not reduced to something or the description of some things, but remains no-thing or in-between this or that, subject or object. Pilgrim claims that the literal, descriptive world is collapsed in direct, immediate experience. "Gray space" is an in-between space, where space and time merge into one flowing moment. It features expectant stillness and open spaces filled with possibilities. It becomes a relational merging into the "third world" of the in-between reality. It is a third world between an interior which is open and an exterior which is not cut off, it is the realm where they both merge, thus the intervening territory between spaces.

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person to witness and experience existence as real and unreal. The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra ultimately allow a person to see what Ibn al-Arabi calls an impossible existence as existent. It becomes an intermediate world that is intrinsically ambiguous. At best it could be said it is neither this nor that or perhaps both this and that.

Hence it is named a garden [etymologically, concealment]. (IV 250.23)

His words are correct that there is what no eye has seen' in the Garden, that is, in the curtain—on the basis of the metaphorical interpretation, not exegesis. Were an eye to see it, it would not be curtained. Were someone to see it, he would speak about it and it would be heard. Were it heard, it would be limited. Were it limited, it would pass into his heart and be known.

This is an affair that veils us from Him through a veil that is not known, for He is in the curtain called the Garden. Since His identity is identical with the curtain, nothing veils us save the fact that we make what we see a curtain, so our aspiration attaches itself to what is behind the curtain, that is, the curtained. (III 541. 20)

Thus the form gives him direct encounter, since it carries the eyesight and all the faculties. Hence you witness Him in entity and directly within the form through the name Manifest, since He is your eyesight. But you witness Him in knowledge through the name Nonmanifest, since He is the eyesight of the instrument through which you perceive what you perceive. (IV 19.12)¹¹⁴

To conclude I want draw attention to Maria Subtelny's noteworthy essay on gardens in the Persian mystical imagination. Although her main argument is centred on a poem by Rūmī, she introduces the idea of the power of the imagination, which functions similarly to a reflecting mirror, to give a vision of

¹¹⁴ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 106, 107.

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True Reality. Quoting Ibn al-ʿArabī's thoughts on witnessing, or unveiling, whereby everything in the Cosmos is a sign of God's creative power and only knowable through the mercy of God's light, she points out that true knowledge only comes through self-disclosure, which finds its locus in the heart of a person. Subtelny explains:

In accordance with the anthropocentrism inherent in Islamic mysticism, it is not nature that is the primary locus of manifestation of the Divine, but man. More precisely it is man's heart which functions like a mirror capable of reflecting the mirror of the Divine. The phenomenal world of nature is, in turn, a reflection from the mirror of the mystic's heart, which Rūmī compares to water on account of the 'subtlety' of its nature, that is, its incorporeality, since in the view of the theosophers, the heart is a psycho-spiritual organ, not a physical one.

Like the reflection of an image in water that appears distorted on account of the current, the terrestrial world of the garden that is reflected from the mirror of the mystic's heart represent not a veridical reality, but an illusionary image (*khayāl*), akin to the virtual image described by the physics of light and the science of mirrors.¹¹⁵

Tracing her argument back to Ibn al-ʿArabī and his concept of the imaginal world, or *Mundus Imaginalis*, described by Henry Corbin, Subtelny points out that this intermediary realm, existing between the sensory world of created phenomena and the spiritual world of the Unseen, represents the core of imaginal vision. This is the realm of the active or creative imagination, also known as the *barzakh*, and it is only penetrable through the heart, which in itself is a *barzakh*, balanced between sensory and intellectual knowledge. In Sufi mysticism the heart

¹¹⁵ Maria Subtelny, "The Traces of the Traces: Reflection of the Garden in the Persian Mystical Imagination," in *Gardens and Imagination: Cultural History and Agency*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2008), 24.

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is considered the seat of visionary and imaginal vision; being on the Sufi path is to see the world with the —~~ey~~ eye of the heart.” True knowledge comes to the one who, with the eye of the heart, can see past the virtual garden to its inner reality. It is through a process of concealing and revealing, which occurs at one the same time that the phenomenological garden can be thought of as a mirror reflecting True Reality. The —~~terrestial~~ terrestrial garden is transmuted by the world of the imagination into the reflection of a reflection that mirrors the mirror of divine Reality,” and ultimately —~~nto~~ into a trace of a trace that is to be traced back to its divine ontological root through the perfect saint, the exemplary human being who functions as the intermediary between the world of spirit and the world of matter.” Here the beauty of the garden serves as a setting for contemplation and reflection because it is the —~~et~~ eternal symbolization for the imaginal gardens within.”¹¹⁶

Conan claims Subtelny’s argument centres on the mystical imagination mirroring Reality and this mirroring, in itself, —~~em~~ demands a theosophical understanding of some body functions (the heart, the sense of scent and taste, inner vision), of the metaphorical mode of thinking from which it proceeds, and the theory of poetical language as a veil of concealing and revealing Reality at the same time.”¹¹⁷ Subtelny maps for us a practice of space whereby a person by means of —~~ed~~ meditation” on the phenomenological qualities of the garden can reach a sense of self-awareness by entering into

¹¹⁶ Subtelny, “The Traces of the Traces,” 19-31.

¹¹⁷ Michel Conan, “Methods and Perspectives for the Study of Gardens and their Reception,” in *Gardens and Imagination: Cultural History and Agency*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2008), 5.

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the world of the *barzakh*. The gardens not only represent reality, but they also hold up to the traveller an image of the cosmos mirrored within the human heart. Through this encounter the traveller realises that boundaries are blurred, by which the imaginative is transposed into the realm of the real.

Thus, we can agree with Henri Lefebvre's observation that it is to err to remove social space from a person's range of vision by transforming it merely into an abstract space or mental space. The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra understood simply in abstract terms, as a symbol of paradise, is to forget that a person, the practical "I," is both individual and social, existing within in a space where it must either recognise itself or become lost. Lefebvre claims it is only when the body is seen as a —pratico-sensory totality" that the decentering of knowledge and its recentering can occur.¹¹⁸

I have looked at the spaces of the Alhambra courtyard gardens through the lenses of Ibn al-Arabī. Understanding these gardens as sources of knowledge with multiple layers of meaning implies on the one hand a culture which was not unfamiliar with the teachings of Ibn al-Arabī.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, it shows us a garden space that stands in relation to the spaces around it and as a result of this relationship becomes inspired, for the garden, as social space, is never just a passive, simple frame for the activity taking

¹¹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 61-65, 92-99.

¹¹⁹ See also Robinson, "Marginal Ornament," 189, 190. A very interesting book dealing with the cultural context of a garden imagination is *Gardens and Imagination: Cultural History and Agency*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks). Conan writes that gardens allow humans to dwell poetically in the world. This involves a garden imagination framed by culture. Garden imagination does not prescribe particular content or give access to a universal or cultural body of images, although it can lead a person's imagination in a certain direction according to the cultural processes of the time. Garden imagination engages in performative actions that make sense with respect to the culture in which the garden participants live and function.

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place there or a container to be filled up by whatever meanings are assigned to it. On the contrary, it is space to be experienced, constantly making synaesthetic demands on the body, offering its visitor a milieu of carefully organised sensations, emphasizing a perception of space that is fluid and changeable. If we agree with Lefebvre that by bringing the body back into space it is possible to restore the sensory-sensual, we can claim that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra transcends rigid meaning structures, for meaning is now found in understanding the gardens' movement and accompanying rhythms.¹²⁰

The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra hold up a mirror to the experiencing subject, disclosing a relationship between form and meaning to allow a person to witness not only a reflection of the self, but also to find signified within it a third space, both imaginary and real, linking architecture, body and consciousness. It is my view that the creativeness of these courtyard gardens lies in the fact that they are a *barzakh*, that they can be recognised as a space of the neutral, whereby they become limit spaces blurring the realities of what is real and what is not real. As such, they are also spaces of the imagination, whereby sensations, memories and emotions serve a person to position herself/himself creatively in the world.

¹²⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 363.

Chapter Four

The Alhambra: A Journey of Discovery

Everything here appears calculated to inspire kind and happy feelings, for everything is delicate and beautiful. The very light falls tenderly from above, through the lantern of a dome tinted and wrought as if by fairy hands. Through the ample and fretted arch of the portal I behold the Court of Lions, with brilliant sunshine gleaming along its colonnades and sparkling in its fountains. The lively swallow dives into the court, and, rising with a surge, darts away twittering over the roofs; the busy bee toils humming among the flower-beds; and painted butterflies hover from plant to plant, and flutter up and sport with each other in the sunny air. . . . He, however, who would behold this scene under an aspect more in unison with its fortunes, let him come when the shadows of the evening temper the brightness of the court, and throw a gloom into the surrounding halls. Then nothing can be more serenely melancholy, or more in harmony with the tale of departed grandeur.¹

≈

In the Same Space

Environment, of house, of city centres, city quarters
Which I look upon and where I walk; years and years.
I have created you in the midst of joy and in the midst of sorrows;
With so many circumstances, with so many things.
And you have been made sensation, the whole of you, for me.²

≈

A place may be no more than a patch of light, or a moment on a journey.³

Experiencing products of architecture involves movement. One passes from outside to inside, or through the serial stages if on a route. Even in a small enclosed space it is not possible to look in all directions simultaneously, so one moves around.⁴

¹ Washington Irving, *Tales of the Alhambra* (León: Everest, 2005), 99,100.

² Constantine P. Cavafy, *The Poems of C. P. Cavafy*, trans. John Mavrogordato (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 182.

³ Simon Unwin, *Analyzing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

Chapter Four

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters I have mapped Ibn al-Arabi's concept of the *barzakh* onto the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra in order to show how their architectural forms participate in a spatial reading of these gardens as spaces of the imagination. I have also explored Louis Marin's concept of the neutral, drawing from his arguments those points that echo Ibn al-Arabi's statements on the *barzakh*, thus linking both terms together as a third space standing in relation to its surrounding spaces. Most importantly, Marin's neutral enables us to understand these gardens, not only as a *barzakh*, but also as places filled with possibilities. Keeping these theoretical issues in mind, I explored the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as dynamic architectural ensembles, actively producing a sense of space full of meaning for those visitors aware of their codes and sign systems.

However, in the previous chapters I have also explored another aspect of the *barzakh*, the *barzakh* as liminal space. The *barzakh* as liminal space turns the space of the *barzakh* into an "in-between" space filled with movement, relations and transformations. It is this liminality that allows for a slight shift in perspective. Understood as a liminal and neutral space, the *barzakh* is essentially a travel narrative. The *barzakh* effectively ties together places that through this linkage set up a narration; these places become stops on a journey. As Marin explains, a narrative is always a form of waiting and expectation, thus it always implies the possibility of the unexpected, making it more or less an "anticipation of the unexpected." Travel narrative is that type

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of narrative where the story becomes involves with geography; it brings together places and it is this circuit that constitutes the narration. From this point of view, it will be possible for me to explore an aesthetic experience of the courtyard gardens open to all who travel through its spaces.

The essence of travel narrative is this succession of places traversed by a network and punctuated by names and local descriptions. Traversing the network raises it from anonymity and exposes its unchanging pre-existence. It is geography in the sense of an inscription. Names are written on it and in a land that is the absolute reference system for all discourse. It is the world as ultimate horizon of all acts, of all conduct, of all behaviour and fundamental experience. The travel narrative is thus the remarkable transformation into discourse of the map, that geographic icon. It is the discursive figure of the image that is itself the selection of relations of elements in the world, the construct/ion of the world in the form of an analogic model that covers reality with the network of its lines and surfaces. It also does so with it names, thus providing a transformed equivalent.⁵

When we understand the idea of the *barzakh* in terms of a travel narrative, it becomes possible to map the presence of the *barzakh* not only in the physical gardens but also in the narratives, in literature and in film, on these gardens. The *barzakh* becomes both —product and model of that discourse.”⁶

In *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds*, which according to the commentary of the translator Angela Jaffray is a treatise on the *barzakh*, Ibn al-Arabi clearly underscores this hypothesis. After the dedication Ibn al-Arabi continues with these words:

⁵ Marin, *Utopics*, 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33, 45

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The book came to me from the city situated on the equator, assigned to the temperate climate, fortified by [spiritual] powers: Mount Sinai, The Land Made Safe, fashioned of water and clay, uniting the “most beautiful of constitutions” with the “lowest of degrees”. . . . I mounted the *Burāq* of my spiritual aspiration and departed from the cycle of this grief. I fell into the sea of hyllic matter, and beheld the next world and the present one. . . . So I rose from that gloomy darkness, leaving the *Burāq* of my aspiration in it. I was transported to the thrones of subtle grace and the couches of the celestial cushions, until I reached the station of rejoicing where I set myself to oscillate like a hanging lamp. . . . Then the Universal Tree of the garden, described as the Likeness, was unveiled to me. I observed a tree “whose root is firm and whose branches are in heavens.” Its fruit is in the hand of the Deity, who sits upon the Throne. Among its branches sat the Crow and the strange „*Anqā*, and in the shelter of its boughs perched the Eagle and the Ringdove. I greeted the Tree and it answered, greeting me even more finely. It said; “Listen, O wayfarer, O king.”⁷

Even though Ibn al-Arabi’s travel narrative maps out a world of the imagination, a “mesocosm between the spiritual and material worlds,” it effectively illustrates the transformation of space into discourse, the creation of “another” world that is simultaneously “world/non-world” and accordingly a *barzakh*.⁸

Marin maintains that description presents “itself,” carrying along with it in the form of discourse “the echo of a visible object, of a transcendent and present referent” while actually constituting the referent. This insight informs my use of the travel narrative as both map and vehicle in the deconstruction of the

⁷ Ibn Arabi, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds: Treatise on Unification*, translated, with introduction and commentary by Angela Jaffray (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2006), 28-35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

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garden courtyards of the Alhambra as spaces of the imagination, informed by a sensually and aesthetic experience of its qualities as a *barzakh*.⁹

This premise allows me to employ travel, especially the medieval Islamic concept of travel, as a figure of transformation imparting knowledge through experience, while simultaneously mapping these imaginative travels on the physical spaces of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. As a point of departure, I will draw attention to such terms as *riḥla*, *siyāha* and *Ajāʿib* and their function and meaning within a medieval Islamic travel vocabulary.

I am well aware, however, of the concerns brought forward by current discourses on travel and more specifically tourism.¹⁰ As Roxanne Euben points out, the critique against travel is that it valorises mobility and indifference over concrete attachments on the one hand. On the other hand, the association of travel with curiosity, knowledge and reflection simultaneously produces an image of people who are left behind, as well as an image of those —“xotics” on the other end of the journey. Furthermore, when immobility is linked to inertia, stasis and complacency, it characterises those who do not travel as lacking in curiosity or knowledge.¹¹ However, Euben argues, travel can also be thought of as theory:

Theorizing involves examining and making explicit the assumptions and commitments that underlie everyday actions, a practice that at once

⁹ Marin, *Utopics*, 53.

¹⁰ See Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, eds. *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xii, for their discussion of Muslim travel as being complex with multiple associations.

¹¹ Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travellers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 29. See also Tim Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj: Performance and Meaning at a Symbolic Site* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3-6 for a critique on some of the influential theories of tourism.

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presupposes and enacts a kind of journey, to a perspective critical distance from daily engagements. So understood, literal or imaginative exposures to what is unfamiliar can inaugurate precisely the kind of dislocation from which it becomes possible to learn about other people and practises, gain critical purchase on one's own, and discern formerly unrecognised patterns and connections.¹²

Euben claims travel, as such, indicates both a metaphor for and a practise of journeying. Furthermore, travel involves translation as the traveller makes that which is unfamiliar, familiar. Euben, however, continues to point out the dangers involved in a radical detachment, intellectual and emotional, of those theories of knowledge that privilege the foreignness of the other world. Here the language of travel is often a language of dislocation and estrangement. On the other side, those travel narratives that comment on utopian visions, as found in Thomas Moore's *Utopia* and Naguib Mahfouz's *Rihlat Ibn Fattuma*, are very often engaged with those realities they claim to transcend.

In such instances journeys to fantastic places become the vehicle for exploring the limits and imaginative potentialities of conventional and quite specific human arrangements. In this instance, vision does not connote the observation of the world as it really is' but rather an antidote to the naturalizing of current social and political conditions, the tendency to project what happens to be at a particular moment and place onto both past and future of human condition. Utopian visions enlarge the boundaries of what we can imagine our world to be.¹³

In an attempt to move away from the radical detachment mentioned by Euben, I will propose that Ibn al-Arabī, the spiritual traveller per exemplar, introduces a theory of knowledge that emphasises the existence of a

¹² Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 23, 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24-29.

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relationship between knowledge and the object of knowledge. This relationship highlights the idea of transferral, or movement between the perceived object, as it is in itself, and its subsequent form in the mind and imagination of the knower.¹⁴ By turning to Ibn al-ʿArabī, it is possible for me to confirm and expand Euben's claim that the attainment of knowledge should always be a hermeneutically informed endeavour. Understood through the lenses of Ibn al-ʿArabī, the search for knowledge is an open-ended inquiry, which is at all times mindful of the embeddedness of both "reader" and "text" in the encounter.¹⁵ Here knowledge becomes that which is revealed in the "translating practices of the traveller who purveys and represents what is unfamiliar by ways of comparison with what is familiar, an activity that simultaneously discloses and articulates the shifting boundaries and content of other and self."¹⁶ This search, according to Ian Almond, is movement from form to what one sees beyond form. However, Almond claims it is a "thoroughly deconstructible notion of 'beyond' that is at work here" as Ibn al-

¹⁴ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 56-60.

¹⁵ Ian Almond, "The Meaning of Infinity in Sufi and Deconstructive Hermeneutics: When is an Empty Text an Infinite One?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72.1 (2004): 106. Almond comments that, when viewed in a contemporary light, one of the features of Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics is the collapsing of the distinction between author, text and reader.

¹⁶ Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 34. See also James W. Morris, "How to Study the *Futūḥāt*: Ibn ʿArabī's own Advice," The Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society, <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/index.html> (accessed September, 02, 2011). In his comments on how to study the *Futūḥāt* Morris points out that Ibn al-ʿArabī's rhetoric forces his readers to situate themselves in at least two "ordinarily separate dimension at the same time: the intellectual, discursive, ostensibly 'objective' dimension" in order to relate to the external cosmos and the social world and the "inner, experiential, inevitably highly personal spiritual dimension." See also James W. Morris "Spiritual Imagination and the 'Liminal' World: Ibn ʿArabī on the *Barzakh*" *POSTDATA* 15.2 (1995): 43, 4 in which Morris discusses how to read and understand Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings, especially the fact that Ibn al-ʿArabī, through his writing style, wants to bring about in the attentive reader a "suddenly transformed state of immediate awareness, in which each of the implicit dualities (or paradoxes) of our usual perception of things—the recurrent categorical suppositions of subject and object, divine and human, spiritual and material, earthly and heavenly—is directly transcended."

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al-Arabi never really problematizes the word *meaning* . . . what is significant is the way an element of adventure and uncertainty is introduced. . . . The text becomes the means to an encounter with something radically other.”¹⁷ For Ibn al-Arabi knowledge, spiritual or secular, is always a process of —obtaining,” or finding through perception. The attainment of knowledge at all times carries with it a necessary component of action, a combination which medieval Sufis readily adopted in their terminology and in their way of life.¹⁸ In the language of mysticism the very word *ṭarīqa* indicates spiritual action, as the term incorporates ideas of —way,” “road” and —method.”

The divine quest was presented as a route, an initiative, an itinerary, or an approach, and the aspirant in/to God is a viator [wayfarer]: according to the case, a *sālik* who is making his way to God, a *sāʾir* who walks in the way of God, or a *wāsil* who has reached the point of arrival in God. More globally, Muslim mysticism itself appears as a discourse of the voyage in which all means of travel are good to imagine. Its linguistic universe is so strongly marked by terms relating to walking, horseback riding, the cavalcade, and covering ground that it seems incapable of speaking any other language. This is why mystical writing unfolds like a topographical text that speaks in terms of routes, roads, stations, stages, and watering places.¹⁹

Houari Touati states that in Islamic mysticism all learning was the systematic pacing out of space whereby the voyage becomes the main instrument of a hermeneutics of space. By travelling throughout the —Abode of Islam” the mystics transformed it into a spiritual space, which went hand in hand with an inner transformation of the individual self. As a result, with emphasis on direct

¹⁷ Almond, —The Meaning of Infinity in Sufi and Deconstructive Hermeneutics,” 113.

¹⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 56,

¹⁹ Houari Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 165.

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experience, the mystical itinerary was turned into a vision of place filled with signs and symbols that needed to be contemplated and interiorised.²⁰ Peter Lamborn Wilson calls it a poetics of wandering whereby Sufism becomes a kind of —nomadosophy” as the entirety of the spiritual project is expressed in the symbolism of a voyage.²¹

Accordingly, my aim is to develop an understanding of the *barzakh* as a mode of being-in-the-world, which simulates a journey, for all travel is eventually a journey of awareness, thus making it an act of the imagination. Journeying, consequently, involves not only the physical movement from one place to another, but it also signifies an emotional movement in the traveller.²² In this respect, journeying ultimately becomes a way of finding oneself.

Thus, in order to argue that movement is a process of —wayfinding,” I place in conversation with Ibn al-Arabi the anthropologist Tim Ingold.²³ Ingold argues

²⁰ Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, 7.

²¹ Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993), 129, 132. Wilson, also writing under the pseudonym Hakim Bey, published an article —Overcoming Tourism” <http://hermetic.com/bey/tourism.html> (accessed September, 6, 2012), in which he comments on ways to move beyond tourism where the emphasis is on difference, to an art of travel focused on gaining knowledge and an attentiveness to the world, similar to the travels usually associated to the Sufi dervish. He calls this kind of travel not tourism, but travel as —sacred drift.”

²² Eickelman and Piscatori, ed. *Muslim Travellers*, xii.

²³ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 220. I am turning to Ingold at this point and placing him in conversation with Ibn al-Arabi. I acknowledge that they are centuries apart and from two completely different backgrounds, but there is also a common thread running through their arguments, furthermore, Ingold provides us with the tools to travel through the landscape of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*. Although Ingold speaks out against certain definitions of space and landscape, it is his arguments that landscape puts emphasis on form in just the same way that the concept of the body emphasises form rather than function. The body becomes the form in which a creature is present in being-in-the-world and the world it is being-in is presented in the form of the landscape. Body and landscape becomes complementary terms, each implying and sustaining the other in an unfolding of a field of relations, a process known as embodiment. However, most importantly, concerning our own arguments is Ingold

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that people know their way around the world in terms of a “complex-process metaphor.” Within this “complex-process metaphor,” wayfinding becomes a skilled performance through which the traveller, by means of finely tuned powers of perception and action, “feels her/his way” towards her/his goal. In this process travellers are continually adjusting their movements in response to their environment. It is, thus, through the unfolding of a field of relations established by the traveller, within a given environmental context, that knowledge of the world is obtained.

In what follows, I will map the importance of movement and physical experience in the contemplation of a garden. On this route I will turn to Giuliana Bruno’s wonderful book, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*.²⁴ Bruno presents us with a cultural history of the spatiovisual arts with a focus on motion pictures. In her words: “*Atlas of Emotion* explores the relation of the moving image to other visual sites, ‘fashioning’ in particular its bond to architecture, travel culture, and the history of the visual arts as well as its connection to memory and that of mapmaking.”²⁵ Bruno draws our attention to the relation between the moving image and other visual sites, especially to its bond with architecture. It is this bond between the moving image and architecture that forms the centre of an

understanding that this process of embodiment is a “movement of *incorporation* rather than inscription, not a transcribing of form onto material but a movement wherein forms themselves are generated.”

²⁴ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

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architectonics of space, which she identifies as a —haptic space of stie-seeing.”²⁶

Taking us to the Greek etymology of the word *haptic*, Bruno explains that haptic means to come into contact with, whereby it denotes a sense of touch, which constitutes the —reciprocal contact between us and the environment.” Haptic is also related to a kinesthesia, which is —the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space.” The haptic becomes an agent in the formation of space, both geographical as well as cultural. Refocusing the attention, not on a dominant and detached vision, but on a haptic perspective of architectural motions, the map Bruno plots is one of movement and emotion.²⁷

Bruno’s *Atlas* is a travel journey through the cinematic spaces of moving pictures and it is on this journey that we encounter links between movement and architecture, a moving picturesque and the aesthetic experience of garden spaces. Drawing from her observations, I argue that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra can potentially turn their visitors from passive spectators into active participants, inviting them on an epistemic journey of discovery.

Arnold Berleant’s and Ronald Hepburn’s theories of aesthetic experience of the environment are important aspects of this discussion. Both scholars stress the importance of sense experience in the aesthetic appreciation of nature. Influenced by John Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Berleant

²⁶ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 6

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6

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argues for a participatory model of aesthetic experience. Here the environment, such as a garden, does not stand completely independent from a perceiving subject, but also imposes itself significantly on a person, thereby engaging perceiver and environment in a relationship of mutual influence.²⁸

For Hepburn, aesthetic experience is a complex activity which cannot be reduced to taking in only the surface qualities of the object presented. It is an experience in which the object becomes the —centre of, and is the occasion of, many possible lines of reflection or movements of the mind, transformations of perception, attitudes and feelings that may affect a person's life and modify the quality of his experience long after he has ceased to contemplate the particular object itself."²⁹ Not only does the experience elicit an emotional or imaginative response, it is also a person's imagination and emotion that flavours the perceptual experience. It is imagination and experience that guide the senses in their aesthetic framing of the experience by directing attention to those factors that bring forth a personal response. In essence aesthetic experience is a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between object and subject.

It is, however, the theories of Gernot Böhme and Mikel Dufrenne that will bring me back full circle to Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh*. Böhme introduces us to the term atmosphere, which he situates in what he calls a new aesthetic discourse.

²⁸ Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment: Variations on a Theme* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 8.

²⁹ Ronald Hepburn, *Wonder and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 1.

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Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way.³⁰

Böhme further defines atmosphere as a —typical in-between phenomenon,” which is situated between object and subject. As an intermediary phenomenon, aesthetic atmosphere shares in the qualities of the *barzakh* as limit, for atmosphere is at once —object-like emotions, which are randomly cast into a space” and —nothing without a discerning subject.”³¹ Qualified as the *barzakh*, Böhme’s atmosphere has ontological status, as undivided unity, as third thing, standing in relation between perceiver and perceived. It is also from this common reality that something can be —named either from the side of the object or from the side of the perceiver” and it is the production of this common reality that we will explore in the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.³² From this point of view, I will trace how the courtyard gardens, already defined as a *barzakh*, produce atmosphere through a play of light and sound, which makes them, when perceived as such, spaces of the imagination.

³⁰ Gernot Böhme, “Acoustic Atmospheres: A Contribution to the Study of Ecological Aesthetics,” trans. Norbert Ruebsaat, *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 1. 1 (2000): 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15. See also Ibn al-Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, ed. Ralph Austin (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980), 120. Austin explains that a major theme of Ibn al-Arabi, discussed by him in the chapter on Joseph, is the cosmic shadow. The cosmic shadow can be seen in two ways, firstly as an image of the cosmos itself, thus being in a certain way detached and separate from Being, but also being nothing without the light of Being. Secondly the shadow is seen as an image of all the unmanifested states or latent essences of the cosmos. Thus, the shadow is an image of the created or the uncreated cosmos; it is in essence nothing other than Being, either as a reflecting image or as an inherent content of knowledge.

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

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Böhme's atmosphere finds echoes in Mikel Dufrenne's exposition of aesthetic sensuousness. When a work of art, or in this case the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, is perceived aesthetically this act involves the sensuous. The sensuous is more than merely the physical form of the object; it is the "perceptible element [*le sensible*] which is communicated only in its presence" and "rests on a meaning or sense [*sens*] with which consciousness can be satisfied." Furthermore, the sensuous requires a subject that opens herself/himself to the object so that s/he can be absorbed by it.

Thus I am in the presence of the aesthetic object as soon as I belong to it. I have become indifferent to the outside world, which I perceive only marginally and which I give up considering so as to experience the truth of what has been presented to me. What has been presented is the sensuous in all its glory, not a sensuousness that is unorganized and meaningless but one which says itself, so to speak, through the strict logic of its development and also says something else (it does the latter both through what it represents—to the extent that it is regulated by a representation—and through what it expresses in saying itself).³³

Edward Casey explains that Dufrenne's aesthetic sensuousness possesses its own forceful and demanding character which pulls a spectator into a fully meaningful relationship. Casey continues by stating that this relationship organises the sensuous by means of a spatial and temporal "schema," with the resulting consequence of turning the object into a "quasi subject." The object becomes capable of retaining internal spatiotemporal relationships within itself. Furthermore, it is these interior relationships that constitute the

³³ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. by Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Doming and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 11-14.

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—world” of the aesthetic object. However, this —world” is not a detached cosmos filled with distinct actions or things, but rather it is a —world” filled with atmosphere.³⁴

However, similarly to Böhme’s atmosphere, the —world” of the aesthetic object does not exist independently; it exists in order to be perceived by a present subject. In fact, it needs us to perceive it, for as spectators we are its —essential witnesses” and we are —called upon to confirm it in its autonomy.”³⁵

As spectator, the subject cannot remain passive, but must become dynamically engaged in the object itself, an involvement which is nothing other than perception.³⁶ Object and subject exist in a reciprocal relationship within the sensuousness of the aesthetic experience. This relationship, when considered in terms of the characteristics of the *barzakh*, is also a paradoxical relationship. For although the subject takes in the object through the senses and the object becomes part of the subject’s imagination, they simultaneously remain external to one another within the experience.

Dufrenne explains:

In the relationship which unites the aesthetic object with me and subjects me to the aesthetic attitude, it is, after all, the aesthetic object which has the initiative. I am only the occasion for the logos of feeling to deliver itself and to speak through me. Everything takes place as if the object needed me in order that the sensuous may realize itself and discovers its

³⁴ Edward S. Casey, foreword to *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, by Mikel Dufrenne, trans. by Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Doming and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xxvi.

³⁵ See also Ibn al-Arabi’s discussion on the motive behind the creation of the cosmos as the love God had to be known in order to show mercy to the cosmos by its knowing Him. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi’s Metaphysics of the Imagination* New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 130-134.

³⁶ Casey, foreword to *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, xxviii. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 56,

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meaning. . . . Then I recognise in the object an interiority and an affinity with myself. I intend the aesthetic object, but I intend it as consubstantial with myself. While penetrating into it, I allow it to penetrate into me, rather than keeping it at a distance. It does not cease being an object while it mingles with me. The distance which it has is not abolished because I am absorbed in it, since it remains a rule for me and imposes its meaning on me. Such is the paradox: I become the melody or the statue, and yet the melody and statue remain external to me. I become them so that they can be themselves. It is in me that the aesthetic object is constituted as other than me.³⁷

All these theories of aesthetic experience and the role played by both the subject and the object in some way or another highlight the importance of Ibn al-Arabi's understanding of the *barzakh* as an alternative way of looking at being-in-the-world. Within the space of the *barzakh* the observer is brought into an encounter with another —world.” Although this encounter is expressed in different terms by the above scholars, they share a common characteristic in that there is an implied transcendence within this encounter. It is a movement from mere perception towards awareness. Dufrenne claims that this transformation occurs when imagination, in a transcendental function, allows for a movement from reflection and feeling into understanding and knowledge.³⁸

Hence, I am proposing that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra offer us an aesthetic experience involving a practise of space, which is also a practise of journeying. Our passage through the garden entails the dynamic

³⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 231, 232. See also Ibn al-Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 123 where he discusses light and the cosmic shadow. Ibn al-Arabi comments on the fact that objects appear different when they are seen from a distance, thus different from their actual source, which proves that an object is at once real and part of the imagination.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 422-425.

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interaction of space, movement and bodily presence, ultimately transforming it into —narrativized space.”³⁹ This —narrativized space,” when considered in terms of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s imaginal world, becomes a reservoir of signs mapped onto the route of the traveller-viewer. It becomes a journey through the real and unreal, familiar and unfamiliar, sensual and the emotional. It is a —poetics of journeying” with the emphasis on witnessing or seeing with your own eyes.⁴⁰ Wilson states that for Ibn al-ʿArabī travel was more than only a search for knowledge found in the collection of *hadith* or legal texts; it was to experience those places where the mundane world was touched by another world. Travelling was to search for doorways into the *Mundus Imaginalis* and to write about them. Ibn al-ʿArabī’s writings, however, are more than just a genre of travel writing. These writings belong to the —poetics of Sufi wandering,” which leads its reader on a spiritual journey of discovery where existent and non-existent meet in the borderland of the *barzakh*.⁴¹

TRAVEL: A PRACTISE OF EXPLORATION

As I have embarked on a path of mapping out the space between the visible and invisible in the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, it is only appropriate that this journey begins with a word of caution from Ibn al-ʿArabī himself.

Every rational person must know that the journey is based upon toil and hardships of life, on afflictions and tests and the acceptance of dangers and very great terrors. It is not possible for the traveller to find in this journey unimpaired comfort, security, or bliss. For waters are variously flavoured and weather changes, and the character of the people at every

³⁹ A term I borrowed from Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 64.

⁴⁰ Also referred to as *autopsia*, from Greek *autopsiā*, meaning: a seeing for oneself

⁴¹ Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift*, 136, 139.

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place where one stops differs from their character at the next. The traveller needs to earn what is useful from each situation. He is the companion of each one for a night or an hour, and then departs. How could ease be reasonably expected by someone in this condition?⁴²

In contrast, John Urry, author of *The Tourist Gaze*, writes that modern travel has moved away from the emphasis on travel as an opportunity for discourse and knowledge towards an emphasis on the visualization of the travel experience, thus, travel as eyewitness observation. Although it can be argued that there is more than one tourist experience, Urry's tourist gaze implies a distant, objectified gaze. This gaze, according to Urry, is captured and frozen in postcards and photos to be endlessly reproduced and recalled. Furthermore, according to Urry, travel has become a leisure activity demarcating and regulating spheres of social practice into two opposite domains, work and not-work or real and unreal.⁴³ In this rigid delineation of difference, I find myself at a crossroads, asking the question posed by Jacques Lacan: —In so far as it is a search for truth . . . is it to be located where tradition has always placed it . . . as visual centering?" Or do we steer onto a new path which brings us back to the —regulation of form, which is governed, not only by the subject's eye, but by his expectations, his movement, his grip, his muscular and visceral emotion—in short, his constitutive presence, directed in what is called his total intentionality."⁴⁴

⁴² Ibn Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat*, trans. Rabia Terri Harris (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1981), 27, 28.

⁴³ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1996), 2-4. See also note 21.

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 70.

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Travelling through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra should thus be thought of in terms of a journey whose goal is a hermeneutics of perceptual experience derived from an exegetic assemblage of a *barzakhian* space. This journey is ultimately a voyage in search of knowledge, not unlike an Arabic *riḥla*. Stefania Pandolfo explains the Arabic *riḥla* as the departure from one's place and one's self. Tracing the etymology of *riḥla* to its verbal root *raḥla*, which means to set out, to depart, to move away, as well as to wonder, she states that the noun *ar-riḥla* means travel or journey and as such it is the technical Arabic term for travelogue. Historically, *ar-riḥla* was a classical literary genre of travel writing which flourished in the Islamic world from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries, although in later centuries it developed into different forms of travel narratives.⁴⁵

According to Sam I. Gellens, travel was considered a meritorious activity in the Muslim tradition, which is proven by the rich vocabulary of words related in some way or another to travel found in the Qur'an and the *Hadith* literature. Although *riḥla*, as travel genre, is most often related to the *Hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, it also shares a bond with *talab al-ilm* or seeking knowledge. Gellens points out that in Muslim Andalusia these terms were used interchangeably, thus implying a physical journey which purpose was the search for knowledge. The *riḥla* as *talab al-ilm* offered a motive for travel

⁴⁵ Stefania Pandolfo, *Impasse of the Angels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), Note 9, 315-316.

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that endowed it with significance and made it an essential aspect of Islamic mysticism.⁴⁶

Houari Touati explains that Islamic mystics travelling throughout the —“Abode of Islam” effected a spiritualization of space which involved two important elements. On the one hand, there was the listening paradigm, whereby under the name of *samā*, or rendered audition, the ear became an important source of understanding, learning and knowledge. On the other hand, congruent and concurrent with it was the idea of *iyān*, the act of seeing with one’s own eyes, thus direct observation. Therefore, important to the voyage was the gathering of knowledge and the description of those experiences that aided in knowledge formation. Both aspects emphasise a personal and direct sense experience with the places encountered on the journey, for such a traveller effectively knows because s/he has seen and heard.⁴⁷

However, for the mystics this was only one aspect of the voyage, an aspect that involved merely the external and visible features of their travels. Simultaneously with this physical movement there was also a spiritual transformation. According to Touati, mystics also felt it their mission to reach beyond the external to search for that which was hidden (*bātin*), hence the definition of Islamic mysticism as the —“science of within” (*ilm al- bātin*). He

⁴⁶ Sam I. Gellens, —“The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach,” in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, eds. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (New York: Routledge, 1990), 53-62. See also Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 36 and Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 10-11.

⁴⁷ Houari Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, 9. He also points out that *iyān* has its counterpart in the ancient Greek concept of *autopsia* which involves the act of seeing with one’s own eyes. See also Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 128 where he refers to Ibn al-Arabi’s explanation of the mutual love that existed between God and the creatures in terms of vision and audition.

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further states that this search required the invention of another form of travel known as *siyāha*, which became one of the primary means for deepening the mystic's knowledge of reality. The intention of this kind of travel was to take the traveller everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.⁴⁸

The mystic journey entailed both bodily movement and spiritual transformation, with high value placed on witnessing with your own eyes. Touati claims that according to mystical exegetes of the Middle Ages, *siyāha* was re-established as a "wandering in the search of God," giving the mystics a new definition as "people who travel continually in search of *itibār* (teaching) and *istibsār* (intuition)." The first of these acts involved learning and becoming "imbued with exemplary observation of the world and its 'marvels,'" while the second aspect allowed them to become "initiated into the intuitive faculty of penetrating beings and things and knowing them thoroughly." Breaking these words down to their root terms, Touati further explains:

The two concepts of *autopsia* represent the cognitive basis on which the *siyāha* rests, making it a modality of the 'description of the world.' *Basar*, the root of the term *istibsār*, refers to the fact of seeing things with one's own eyes as well as penetrating them with one's intelligence. *Basīra* shapes 'inner sight,' which is 'the faculty of penetrating things.'⁴⁹

Although emphasis seems to fall on seeing with your own eyes, it is clear that this emphasis does not indicate the superiority of sight over the other senses, but rather it involves a person being physically present in the experience. At

⁴⁸ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, 158.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

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the very core of this mystical journey lies the idea, enforced by the Qur'an, that everything that exists in nature is full of significance and filled with signs (*ayat*) which should be witnessed and interpreted.⁵⁰ It can, therefore, be argued that this emphasis on witnessing with your own eyes, in order to obtain inner knowledge, established within Sufism a *modus operandi* rooted in the very idea of movement; in fact, it gave meaning to the notion of movement itself.⁵¹

Commenting on the importance of movement in pilgrimage, Bente Nikolaisen writes that all Sufi thought is embedded in the idea of movement.⁵² Furthermore, it is not only travel through geography, i.e. travelling *to*, but also travel of the mind—travelling *through*.⁵² However, important to my use of the *siyāha* as a way of approaching the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra is the suggestion that all these journeys are intimately linked to physical and inner movement.

I have highlighted two different concepts of Islamic journeying that can provide us with guidance when entering the spaces of the Alhambra courtyard gardens. Firstly, there is the *riḥla*, a journey in search of knowledge, and secondly, the *siyāha*, an exterior and interior voyage of discovery. Therefore, I argue that entering the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra should be seen in terms of embarking on an Arabic *riḥla*, a search

⁵⁰ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, 163.

⁵¹ Simon and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 209.

⁵² Bente Nikolaisen, "Embedded Motion: Sacred Travel among Mevlevi Dervishes," in *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, ed. Simon Coleman and John Eade (New York: Routledge, 2004), 93.

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for knowledge, which is simultaneously also a *siyāha*, as it involves both the exterior and interior facets of being-in-the-world.

However, to give voice to this encounter I draw attention to a third Arabic term, *„Ajā‘ib*. The *„Ajā‘ib* has evolved out of the previous two concepts of journeying to become from the ninth century a literary genre commenting on marvels, curiosities and strange beings that were encountered in history and geography. Touati comments that it is not clear whether these observations were true, even though they could also not be considered completely untrue.

The fact that the marvellous operates on the terrain of ambiguity and metamorphosis creates a singular connection between mystic discourse and the *Ajā‘ib*. The two forms of knowledge have in common that they draw from the same Qur‘anic, biblical, and rabbinic sources, and they aim at bringing a response to the essential tensions that confronted the people of past times. Both were thought to contribute to resolving the enigma of relations between the human and the divine, the visible and invisible, the natural and the supernatural, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and the believable and the unbelievable. But whereas cosmographers, geographers, and historians attempted to give enigma and objective interpretation and the moralists to give it a subjective content, the aim of the mystics was to experience it. In their wanderings they went to the end of the world and of society to encounter its many figures and return with adequate answers.⁵³

Again the close bond between gathering knowledge and movement comes to the fore. Pandolfo brings an important perspective on the link between movement and the mystic’s experience of reality. She states that the classical *riḥla* was a journey made by walking, which in Sufi terminology evolved into a divine quest along a route or map filled with wonders and marvels. The map

⁵³ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, 164.

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became a visual image that was simultaneously read and physically traversed. In this sense, the *rihla* becomes a journey and a travel narrative, in fact capturing the map's two-fold character. On the one hand, it is journey through that which is familiar and on the other it also involves a certain movement of displacement in the encountering of the strange and wonderful, even fearful, customs, marvels and wonders. Accordingly, the map can be considered as bifocal in voice and vision, and as such it becomes an intermediary terrain, which when read as text simultaneously —erces the reader to be displaced, to *turn* along with the tracing, setting off on a journey that is also the journey of reading.⁵⁴ Furthermore, by following this path of tracing, the reader renounces her/his viewer's position and embraces the posture of walking.

As is reiterated in the Arab literary tradition, vision and knowledge are first and foremost a *rihla*, a moving away from one's place: displacement and travel, dissemination of oneself through space and time. *Rihla* is the narrative form of a kind of travel that opens a metaphorical journey, but that is also made by walking: an investment of libidinal energy, an expenditure of the body, and of oneself.⁵⁵

When thinking of the courtyard gardens in terms of a map to be read, in view of Pandolfo's exposition of the map's two-fold character, one also has to pay attention to her argument that even before starting to decode the signs on the map, the reader or interpreter has to set out on a path of discovery, following a coded itinerary and realizing at the same time that this itinerary is also a *rihla*, a —moving—away from oneself.” The reader or interpreter is drawn into

⁵⁴ Pandolfo, *Impasse of Angels*, 6, 315.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

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the *riḥla*, where the map is first captured by the eye and then manifested kinaesthetically. By accepting the walker's position, Pandolfo claims, the act of displacement marks the beginning of —another “I”: an ‘_ton-the-path,’ which is also an ‘_eye-in-the-tracing’.”⁵⁶

It becomes clear, according to the arguments of Pandolfo and Touati, that the idea of the map, within these discourses of journeying, emphasises the existence of a close connection between the acts of seeing, movement and reading. Touati claims that this notion gives to any —mystical itinerary the aspect of a conduit to the vision of a place: the place in which the truth of him who speaks true because he has seen is declared and realized.”⁵⁷ Opening oneself up to the truth was rendered in an image of a physical advance, where one had to follow and bodily traverse a route, while simultaneously interpreting its multiple signs. The result was the establishment of a mystical school of writing that aimed to show, within in its topographical writings, an image of a place that was both true and not true.

That type of writing has the particular characteristic of being composed of places or, better, of a succession of pictures showing what could not be said. Because it claims to express the unspeakable, it unfolds like a visual writing in which saying is showing and reading is seeing.⁵⁸

Touati concludes that the *„Ajāʿib*, as travel narrative, originated from a representation of the world of —porous frontiers” between the visible and the invisible, perceptible and imperceptible, and the real and unreal. As such it is a —world of permanent communication between these contrasts.” The *„Ajāʿib*

⁵⁶ Pandolfo, *Impasse of Angels*, 20-22.

⁵⁷ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, 166.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

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produced a discourse out of this ambiguity. By travelling in both worlds at the same time, it gave a voice to the *in-between*.⁵⁹

In Ibn al-Arabi's vocabulary this may be seen to constitute the *barzakh*. The *Ajā'ib* understood as a narrative of the *barzakh* functions as a map that becomes the meeting ground between a concrete and virtual reality. For Bruno, such a map happens to be the visualisation of an itinerary of emotions, a *topos*. Here, the exterior world of the map conveys an interior landscape, whereby the *act* in the tracing," to borrow Pandolfo's expression, makes a world visible and accordingly becomes an *act* of mapping."⁶⁰ The *Ajā'ib*, as a travel discourse of the *barzakh*, is more than just the mapping of space; it is also the movement of a body on a path of *sighting*."

My purpose behind unpacking these Arabic genres of travel and travel writing is to recover them as powerful heuristic tools for understanding and interpreting *barzakhian* spaces, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. By emphasizing a bodily and mental engagement with these spaces, they offer us alternative lenses to view the production of knowledge within these gardens.

⁵⁹ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, 228, 229.

⁶⁰ Pandolfo, *Impasse of Angels*, 2, 6. See also Ingold *The Perception of the Environment*, 220-242 for his argument that mapping and mapmaking should be distinguished from one another. He claims that mapmaking envisions a world without movement, whereas mapping is the unfolding of stories along a route of discovery.

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ON THE GARDEN PATH

I begin this section on knowledge and perception within the garden with an observation on Japanese gardens by the landscape architect and garden designer Marc P. Keane.

In Kabuki theatre the movement of an actor through space is a movement through time—a process called *michiyuki*. Gardeners consider *michiyuki* in the design of the garden path. The path is created as a guide to the garden, revealing it in a succession of layers (*chōjō*), while regulating the timing of the experience as well. . . . Through careful design of the paths, the gardener controls not only the cadence of motion through a garden but what is seen as well.⁶¹

According to Keane, these garden paths cannot be considered only as elements of an overall garden design. Rather, they are the means by which these gardens are revealed to their visitors. As such, the idea behind the concept of a path is filled with significance. The path becomes a living symbol that embodies meaning as it not only physically acts upon the body, but also implies an inner journey of discovery (*siyāha*), an unfolding of the world (real and unreal) as one moves along.

In his article —“Med-Space,” Otto Friedrich Bollnow commented that a path is completely different from a practically planned road. A path, according to him, clings to the natural landscape while thoughtfully curving and winding around obstacles and over barriers. Bollnow states that:

⁶¹ Marc P. Keane, *Japanese Garden Design* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1996), 143. See also the rest of the section dealing with the various techniques on how viewing is controlled in the garden.

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Movement on such a path is different, and the feeling of space is different. The path doesn't shoot for a destination but rests in itself. It invites loitering. Here a man is *in* the landscape, taken up and dissolved into it, a part of it. He must have time when he abandons himself to such a path. He must stop to enjoy the view.⁶²

Otto Friedrich Bollnow's path acts upon its traveller; it entices her/him forward on a journey of discovery. However, whereas his traveller has to stop to enjoy the view, I will argue that the path, in itself, encompasses movement and it is this movement that shapes and forms the *view*." In line with this argument I propose that the space of the *barzakh*, exemplified by the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, is a path filled with light and shadows, which incites the visitor to physically and mentally travel along. In this liminal space, path and visitor become one as through their movement they both partake in the mapping of its aesthetic atmosphere.

The space of a garden, as Henri Lefebvre pointed out, is particularly complex. The garden is by its nature considered an *ideality*" or utopia, occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary. As symbolic space it is filled with symbols of absolute nature and in the gardens of the Alhambra sovereign power as well. At the same time, physical gardens are experienced by the senses; they become part of the lived experience of their users through a body, which in Lefebvre's words, *takes revenge*."⁶³ It is a revenge

⁶² Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Lived-Space*, " *Philosophy Today* 5.1 (1961): 32.

⁶³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 363, 366, 384. According to Lefebvre, thinking of space only in terms of signs and symbols is to fragment space and cut it into pieces. In this process the rhythms, textures and moods of the body are ignored. However, it is the body that is at the heart of any spatial encounter and it in this encounter that the body takes revenge or calls for revenge. In these everyday life encounters the body seeks to make itself known and gain recognition. Especially in leisure spaces, such as the beach, the body, as a result of its

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brought about by a body in space and in motion. Through this act of reprisal, the body is no longer absent, but as a functioning body fully emerged in the sensuous activity and bodily practices of lived spaces such as the garden. In this encounter, there is a —restoration of the sensory-sensual,” that of speech, of voice, of smell and of hearing. No longer is the body banished from the experience. Rather, it is the total comeback of a complete spatial body in all its visual and non-visual capacities.⁶⁴

Taking heed of Lefebvre’s account of embodiment, I have to make it clear that although my journey through the garden is essentially a *rihla*, where experiencing or witnessing with your own eyes plays an important role in knowledge production, it is not a favouring of an abstract analytical gaze. Rather, in the words of Ibn al-Arabi, it is a process of —finding,” a concept which Chittick points out, is —atone and the same time to perceive and to be what truly is. . . . Both knowledge and being are finding” and —ifinding” involves all the senses.⁶⁵

There are six things which perceive: Hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste, and reason. Each of them—except reason—perceives things incontrovertibly (*ḍarūrī*). They are never mistaken in the things which normally become related to them. . . . There is no object of knowledge

sense organs, behave as a total body, breaking through its temporal and spatial shell and —asserts itself more (and better) as subject’ and object’ than as subjectivity’ (in the classical philosophical sense) and as objectivity’ (fragmented in every way, distorted by the visual, by images, etc.). It is in these spaces that the body reclaims its rights and can no longer be ignored or forgotten.

⁶⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 363, 366, 384.

⁶⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 3. See Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994) for a detailed and thought-provoking discussion on the role of the senses in the everyday experience of space and place. He also deftly unpacks terms such as sense and perception and gives his reader a detailed overview of models of perception theory and geography. In Part two of the book four senses are explored in more detail as part of a sensuous geography.

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which can be known by a created thing and cannot be perceived by one of these modes of perception. (I 213.30)⁶⁶

In order to argue that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra afford an experience of presence by becoming a path of discovery, it is important to draw attention to Ibn al-Arabi's use of the two words, *ilm* and *ma'rifa*, both words denoting knowledge. In Sufi thought, the term *ma'rifa* is often associated with a deeper knowledge and it can be translated as *gnosis*. However, for Ibn al-Arabi the distinction between *ilm* and *ma'rifa* lies more in terms of practice and perception. In Ibn al-Arabi's view, knowledge without practice can never be called true knowledge. Most importantly, for Ibn al-Arabi *ma'rifa* does not only involve following a certain path of practice, but *ma'rifa* is a path (*maḥajja*). Hence any knowledge which can be actualized only through practice (*amal*) . . . and wayfaring (*sulūk*) is *ma'rifa* since it derives from a verified unveiling which is not seized by obfuscation."⁶⁷

From these thoughts of Ibn al-Arabi two important facts come to the fore: firstly, the link between knowledge, path and wayfaring, and secondly that this knowledge involves a process of unveiling or finding.

And all of us are wayfarers, since there can be no end. (II 241.28, 243.9, 30)⁶⁸

You will never cease being a traveller as you are now. You will never reach a place of rest. . . . This is your journey in your bodily frame. As for your travel in your true knowledges, it is the like of that. . . . In the

⁶⁶ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 160.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 149. Chittick explains that Ibn al-Arabi employs a number of terms to refer to the perception of God's self-disclosure, but the word most often used is "unveiling." Another synonym for perception or unveiling used by Ibn al-Arabi is "witnessing" referring most often for sight as well as insight, and "finding," as mentioned above, 220, 225.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 288.

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same way you will never cease travelling through bodily deeds and through breaths, from deed to deed . . . you will never cease travelling an essential journey. (II 383.10)⁶⁹

Thus I have thrown you onto the path so that you may know what the situation is. . . . Darkness signifies knowledge of the absent and light signifies knowledge of the witnessed. . . . Daytime belongs to movement, so it is the tasks of the Real. Movement is life, so it pertains to the Real, and stillness is death, so it pertains to creation. . . . And to you belongs what moves in two respects—from and to. (IV 403.15)⁷⁰

It can be argued that Ibn al-Arabi's usage of these words in actuality describes a *rihla*, thus emphasizing the close bond between journeying and truth or knowledge. I have found a similar argument, stressing the link between movement, perception and knowledge production, in the writings of the anthropologist Tim Ingold. Although Ingold is centuries and worlds apart from our mystic Ibn al-Arabi, I find that his arguments not only subtly echo the thoughts of Ibn al-Arabi, but also add to my analysis because of his emphasis on the lived experience of the wayfarer.

The perceiver-producer is thus a wayfarer, and the mode of production is itself a trail blazed or a path followed. Along such paths, lives are lived, skills developed, observations made and understandings grown. . . . The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming.

The wayfarer is continually on the move. More strictly, he *is* his movement . . . the wayfarer is instantiated in the world as a line of travel. It is a line that advances from the tip as he presses on, in an ongoing process of growth and development, or self-renewal. As he proceeds, however, the wayfarer has to sustain himself, both perceptually and

⁶⁹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

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materially, through an active engagement with the country that opens up along his path. Through time to time he must pause for rest and may even return repeatedly to the same place, to do so, each pause is a moment of tension that—like holding one's breath—becomes ever more intense and less sustainable the longer it lasts. Indeed the wayfarer has no final destination, for wherever he is and so long life goes on, there is somewhere further he can go.⁷¹

Only as being-on-the-move can we epistemologically know the world around us, for it simultaneously unfolds or unveils itself along this path for us to perceive, while producing what Lefebvre calls a lived space, a space modified over time and through use, one that is invested with symbolism and meaning.⁷²

Furthermore, the *rihla*, as argued earlier, stresses the importance of witnessing with your own eyes. Although, turning again to Lefebvre, we can also ask, “What do they see?” it is the answer he gives that I find of importance to our discussion here: —“Anyone sees is movements.”⁷³ The concept of continuous movement linked with the idea of bringing forth, or becoming, forms the core of both Tim Ingold's and Ibn al-ʿArabī's epistemology. From Ibn al-ʿArabī's point of view, the idea of bringing forth or perpetual becoming is an essential factor of being-in-the-world, which he proves with the contention that there can be no stillness or lack of movement. Ibn al-ʿArabī explains:

Motion has a tremendous authority which is witnessed in the corporeal bodies and their concomitants (*lawāzim*) and which is intelligible within

⁷¹ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12, 150.

⁷² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 95.

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meanings and everything whose limits are unknown. Motion permeates the existent things in the most complex manner. The first property it possesses in everything other than God is that the entities leave and pass from the state of nonexistence to the state of existence. There can be no rest (*istigrār*) whatsoever in any existent thing, since rest is stillness, and stillness is lack of motion. (II 629.28)⁷⁴

In similar fashion, Ingold states that movement is —not the casting about the hard surfaces of a world in which everything is already laid out, but an issuing along with things in the very process of their generation; not the *trans-port* (carrying across) of completed being, but the *pro-duction* (bringing forth) of perpetual becoming.”⁷⁵ However, what Ingold brings to the conversation is that wayfaring becomes the only mode of inhabiting the earth as knowledge of the world is only gained by a direct perceptual engagement with it. Furthermore, an inhabitant is one who —participates from within in the very process of the world’s continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture.”⁷⁶ Through this process of wayfaring an intimate bond is established between the experience of movement, action and perception by which the landscape, and in this case the garden, fully participates in the sights, sounds and feelings that assail the wayfarer on his journey.

I have already pointed out the relationship in Ibn al-Arabi’s teachings between wayfaring, movement and perception, a relationship I have also traced in the work of Tim Ingold. For my analysis, I highlight Ingold’s

⁷⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 102.

⁷⁵ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 12

⁷⁶ Tim Ingold, “Up, Across and Along,” http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/kp5_02_ingold.pdf (accessed June 20, 2013), 26.

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interpretation of paths as trails along which movement proceeds, whereby shapes and forms of environmental objects are made known by the changes that occur along these paths and by the patterns of light reflected off their outward surfaces. James J. Gibson argues that a point of observation is stationary only as a limit and that a —point of observation, set in motion, describes a path.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, as a moving point of observation entails a path of observation, perception becomes fundamentally about movement. Building on this argument, Ingold claims that perception involves a moving observer, which indicates a unity of movement such as an excursion, trip or voyage, and not a —snapshot” view taken at a few fixed points. In this case, perception is a direct and exploratory activity of a person being-in-the-world. Through movement a person is intimately connected and responsive to her/his total environment.⁷⁸

It is this movement that turns out to be the crux of Bruno’s map of emotions. Emotion, from the Latin *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere*, —to move” and *e* —out,” which speaks clearly about a —moving” force, is the transformative power behind a haptic experience of landscape. In other words, a path of emotion is forged by a moving observer traversing a path through a landscape, understood as a —field of forces.”⁷⁹ Bruno’s reading of emotion as a movement through time and space, as well as inner space,

⁷⁷ James Jerome Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 197, 308. For a detailed interpretation of visual perception, see James Jerome Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1950). See also Katherine Myers, —Theories of Perception and the Landscaped Garden” in *Experiencing the Garden in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Martin Calder (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 13-36, for her interpretation of James, J Gibson’s perception theory in connection of seeing the garden as a picture, especially focussing on depth perception..

⁷⁸ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 12, 11-14.

⁷⁹ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 6. Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, 8.

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transforming the traveller from a static contemplator with a fixed gaze, or in her words, a —disembodied eye/I,” into a moving, experiencing spectator, establishes emotion as an alternative mode of knowledge production.⁸⁰

In an insightful exploration of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s view of the human being, Sa‘diyya Shaikh illustrates that Ibn al-‘Arabī not only stresses a synthesis between body and spirit, but that human completeness includes the body as well as emotions. Thus, all emotions are integral to the completion of the human self.⁸¹ In this sense, emotion as knowledge production is perhaps what Ingold has in mind when he claims that along the path of the wayfarer a different knowledge system operates. It is all the senses that contribute to the experience of a place’s ambience, which in turn is dependent upon the kinds of activities the people within these spaces are engaged in. In this relational context between person and world, meanings are gathered. Furthermore, this relationship is forged along a line of travel, or movement, as such a line advances in an ongoing process of development, growth and self-renewal.⁸² In this process, wayfaring happens to be the —unfolding of a field of relations

⁸⁰ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 56. See also Linda Parshall’s reading of C.C. L. Hirschfeld (1742-1792) in “Motion and Emotion in C.C.L. Hirschfeld’s *Theory of Garden Art*.” in *Landscape Design and the Experience of Motion*, ed. Michel Conan (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003), 35-51, showing his emphasis on the centrality of emotion and motion to the creation and experience of gardens.

⁸¹ Sa‘diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabi, Gender and Sexuality* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 133, 135.

⁸² Ingold, *Being Alive*, 150, 192. See also Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 262-265 for a detailed discussion of his interpretation of the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to argue that vision is ultimately not of things but happens among them. For it is constitutive of the whole perceptual field, drawn around myself at its centre, which both they and I inhabit.”

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established through the immersion of the actor-perceiver within a given environmental context.”⁸³

Being on the garden path is therefore not only a phenomenological encounter with the garden; it also becomes what Christopher Tilley calls a —biographic encounter.”⁸⁴ Moving through the garden, past activities and events are recalled in the phenomenological experience of its spaces, as well as in the reading of its signs. Tilley claims that all landscapes are —embedded in the social and individual times of memory. Their pasts as much as their spaces are crucially constitutive of their presents. Neither space nor time can be understood apart from social practices which serve to bind them together.”⁸⁵ Movement within the garden is intimately related to the formation of personal biographies on the one hand and a reading of the garden’s history through a peeling away of its layers of meaning embedded in its social practices on the other.⁸⁶

According to Bruno, movement in the garden is the unfolding of a —geographic enactment of a heterotopia . . . the nomadic garden enacts geopsychic displacements.”⁸⁷ As heterotopia the garden is capable of

⁸³ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 220.

⁸⁴ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27

⁸⁶ See Peter de Bolla, “The Charm’d Eye” in *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Veronica Kelly and Dorothea E. von Mücke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 89-111 for an interesting essay on the —metaphorics of the eye.” De Bolla argues that this metaphorics includes a grammar of looking which corresponds to the —truth” of vision within specific models of visibility. Paying attention to the viewing of garden landscapes, he plots the existence of two ways gardens were looked at and how this looking governed the creation of the various garden styles. Firstly, he identifies the studious gaze where the eyes collaborate what the mind already knows, thus a look already educated in the semiotics of the garden and secondly, the sentimental gaze, where evidence of the eye is required in order to stir a feeling of emotion.

⁸⁷ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 146, 196

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juxtaposing within its phenomenologically experienced spaces a multiplicity of other (mental) spaces and slices of time. Furthermore, Bruno claims that as —travelling space, it is a site whose system of opening and closing renders it both isolated from and penetrable by other sites . . . the garden's capacity for fluid geography derives from its ability to house a private, even secretive experience while serving fully as a social space."⁸⁸ It is the path that gives meaning to this spatial practice and which in itself becomes the narrator.

In movement on a path through the landscape something is constantly slipping away and something is constantly gained in a relational tactile world of impressions, signs, sights, smells and physical sensations. To understand a landscape truly it must be felt, but to convey some of this feeling to others it has to be talked about, recounted, or written and depicted. In the process of movement a landscape unfolds or unravels before an observer. . . . The importance and significance of a place can only be appreciated as part of movement from and to it in relation to others, and the act of moving may be as important as that of arriving. The path may be a symbol not only of interconnectedness and social relations but of movement through life.⁸⁹

Walking through the garden is essentially a spatial acting-out of the place as it implies the existence of the walker in a relationship with her/his environment, thus making walking a —space of enunciation."⁹⁰ Movement in this sense becomes an art not only of walking, but also of thinking and of operating in the world. —Spatial stories" and forms of narrative understandings are constructed by means of a rhetoric of walking. Walking is about following

⁸⁸ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 196.

⁸⁹ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, 31.

⁹⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 98.

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a path and according to De Certeau it is a path that speaks. Here walking becomes ultimately the enactment of a utopic.

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc. the trajectories it speaks.' All the modalities sing a part in the chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker.⁹¹

These arguments all concur that the garden is a space that is experienced in a ~~viewing~~ viewing that demands motion."⁹² Ingold sums it up:

Proceeding on our way things fall into and out of sight, as new vistas open up and others are closed off. By way of these modulations in the array of reflected light reaching the eyes, the structure of the environment is progressively disclosed. It is no different, in principle, with the senses of touch and hearing, for together with vision these are but aspects of a total system of bodily orientation. Thus the knowledge we have of our surroundings is forged in the very course of our moving through them, in the passage from place to place and the changing horizons along the way . . . the integration of knowledge *along* a path of travel.⁹³

Knowledge production in the garden involves a sensory experience, as Bruno observes, ~~—driven~~ "driven by the haptic: strolling in the garden, a touching experience of feeling through the eye," but it is also more, it is an experience where these senses are activated in a ~~—cumulative~~ cumulative sequence of emotional responses."⁹⁴ The garden as a multi-dimensional world of sensory awareness becomes known through the body's capacity to perceive, as well as the

⁹¹ De Certeau, *The Practise of Everyday Life*, 99.

⁹² Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 219.

⁹³ Ingold, "Up, Across and Along," 29.

⁹⁴ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 219.

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person's expectations, memories and attitudes accompanying this awareness. In this experience there is a mutual involvement of spectator and garden, but the experience also has a reflexive quality whereby the spectator experiences herself/himself, as Hepburn notes, in an —unusual and vivid way. . . . I am both actor and spectator, ingredient in the landscape and lingering upon the sensations of being thus ingredient, rejoicing in their multifariousness, playing actively with nature and letting nature, as it were, play with me and my sense of myself.”⁹⁵ On an ambulatory walk through the garden, the visitor participates in a kinaesthetic experience with the garden. Visitor and garden are engaged in a complex and layered dialectic whereby the garden as a mere visual object is transcended. Not only does the garden as living entity engage all the senses of the visitor, the visitor is also emotionally and imaginatively present in that experience. The interaction between visitor and garden is a comprehensive experiential encounter that includes multisensory experiences and multilayered emotional responses.

Bruno adds to this argument through her important rehabilitation of the picturesque in garden landscaping.⁹⁶ She claims that in terms of a geography of the picturesque, views are set in motion by combining real and imaginary movement. In this picturesque the vistas themselves invite the viewer to physically move into the picture and into the picturing. She claims that the picturesque garden is designed for a peripatetic body where the visitor who moves into the picture is also asked to simultaneously travel through different

⁹⁵ Hepburn, *Wonder and Other Essays*, 13.

⁹⁶ On the picturesque see also Kim Ian Michasiw, —The Revisionist Thesis on the Picturesque,” *Representations* 38 (1992): 76-100.

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spaces. Here the picturesque garden becomes a spectacle in motion viewed by a spectator wandering through its spaces. The garden turns out to be a space narrativised by motion, offering a multiplicity of perspectives to a travelling body. In essence, it is a *siyāha*, or in Bruno's words, an "affair for spatial wanderers" as the moving traveller creates her/his own sense of being through the unfolding of a series of inner and outer relationships. In fact, agreeing with Bruno, understanding the garden as a moving sensual and picturesque space confirms the proposal that the garden's exterior space puts its spectator in "touch" with her/his inner space.

As one moved through the space of the garden, a constant double movement connected external to internal topographies. The garden was thus and outside turned into an inside; but it was also the projection of an inner world onto the outer geography. In sensors mobilization the exterior of the landscape was transformed into an interior map—the landscape within us—as this inner map is itself culturally mobilized. Along the garden route, the picturesque aesthetic topography incorporated an actual reading of the skin surface, the very border between inside and outside.⁹⁷

This reciprocal relationship existing between perceiver and perceived forms the crux of what Arnold Berleant calls a participatory model of aesthetic experience. By moving through the garden, the landscape features act upon its visitors. Paths, in this instance, become "living symbols that embody their meaning, symbols that make us act, commit our bodies, ourselves, to choices."⁹⁸ Curving paths are enticing as they tempt the walker forward to

⁹⁷ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 61, 62, 65, 192-203.

⁹⁸ Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, 12. See also his discussion of two approaches to the observation of the garden. Firstly an observational approach where the garden becomes

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explore what lies around the next bend. A climbing path might invite a person to climb upwards to its summit. Berleant also identifies the “intrinsic delights that paths offer; the changing views, the feel of the ground under foot, the multitude of details along the way,” which all exercise a “dynamic attraction.” Using the garden path as example, Berleant points out that perception of the environment involves more than a detached, unemotional visual eye. Rather, it involves both perceiver and perceived in a powerful union.

The environment is rather the medium in which we live, of which our being partakes and comes to identity. Within this environmental medium occur the activating force of mind, eye, and hand, together with the perceptual features that engage these forces and elicit their reactions. Every vestige of dualism must be cast off here. There is no inside and outside, human being and external world, even, in the final reckoning, self and other. The conscious body moving within and as part of a spatio-temporal environmental medium becomes the domain of human experience, the human world, the ground of human reality within which the discrimination and distinctions are made. We live, then, in a dynamic nexus of interpenetrating forces to which we contribute and respond.⁹⁹

I want to conclude this section on the garden path by returning to Ibn al-Arabi and his observation that the Real is always in a state of union with created existence and that the person who sees the world has seen the Real with her/his insight. Commenting on knowledge's close connection to action, Sa'diyya Shaikh writes that the body becomes a “vehicle of knowing,” as there exists in a person a complete synthesis between the sensory, corporeal realities and an inner knowledge of the real. Quoting Ibn al-Arabi, she argues

a visual object and secondly an aesthetic engagement with the garden, 31-39. See also note 79.

⁹⁹ Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, 12, 13.

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that because of a person's capabilities to have both an inner and outer reality, the path to spiritual completion is connected to service and action. It is an approach that reflects a celebration of the body and materiality as an important part of human spirituality. Not only does one use the body in this service, but the body becomes a locus for the presence of the Divine.¹⁰⁰ Vision is given to a person in order that they can unveil their insights until they can —witness this witness.” (II 480. 12)¹⁰¹ It is this witnessing, or perception, that is called union, whereby the witness becomes joined to witnessing the actual situation. It is a union that cannot turn into separation, as it is a knowledge that cannot be turned into ignorance. Furthermore, this disclosing of the Real in the forms of created existence is disclosed continuously, thus witnessing also takes place continuously, since a person —never cease witnessing forms within themselves and outside of themselves, and that is nothing but the self-disclosure of the Real” (II 558.27).¹⁰²

What Ibn al-Arabi offers us in this statement is a way to pull together our analogy of *riḥla*, *siyāha* and *„Ajāʿib* as an alternative mode of knowledge production and the aesthetic experience of the garden. Both experiences suggest that being-in-the world is the result of a continuous movement through the interior and exterior spaces of being and world. It is while being on a journey that the wayfarer sees and experiences a world. However, while moving through this world knowledge is not only informed in terms of the wayfarer's perceptual encounter with the world, but also imaginatively

¹⁰⁰ Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 133-135. See also the chapter on Adam in Ibn al-Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 47-59.

¹⁰¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 365.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 365, 366.

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translated into knowledge of a —~~no~~ world,” which grows and changes as s/he moves through it. I want to go one step further by suggesting that this path of perception is, in itself, a *barzakh*, because similar to the world of the *barzakh*, it brings into existence both the visible and the invisible. The garden path essentially takes us on a tour in which visible and invisible meet in a space of the neutral where both views are witnessed as one.

Finally bringing our two commentators Tim Ingold and Ibn al-Arabi together again, I want to highlight a comment made by Ingold to which I referred earlier. He claimed that knowledge of our environment is disclosed along a trail forged by the —~~modulations~~ in the array of reflected light reaching the eyes.”¹⁰³ Likewise, for Ibn al-Arabi the nature of all knowledge resides in light, which is being, finding and manifestation.

Were it not for light, nothing whatsoever would be perceived, neither object of knowledge, nor sensory object, nor imaginal object. . . . When you perceive sounds, you call that light hearing.‘ When you perceive objects of touch, you call that light touch.‘ . . . The faculties of smell, taste, imagination, memory, reason, reflection, form-giving, and everything through which perception takes place are all light. (III 276.32, 277.12)¹⁰⁴

Not only is it light that enables the senses to perceive, the fundamental nature of all the senses is also light, thus making our very awareness of

¹⁰³ Tim Ingold, “Up, Across and Along,” 29 http://www.eki.ee/km/place/pdf/kp5_02_ingold.pdf (accessed June 20, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 214, 215. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty “Eye and Mind” in *The Primacy of perception*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159-190. Revised by Michael Smith in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121-149. See also the chapter on Joseph in Ibn al-Arabi, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 119-127.

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being-in-the-world light.¹⁰⁵ Movement on the garden path now becomes a journey whereby the traveller opens herself/himself up to a world sensed as light, while simultaneously becoming immersed in it. This illumination, as Merleau-Ponty observed, has the power to generate the imaginary.¹⁰⁶ With this statement in mind, I move forward on my cartographic travelling. In the previous chapters I have proceeded to map the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as a *barzakh*, but now the path itself became a map that charted movement; moving through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, light blurs the boundaries between the real and tangible, and the unreal and intangible. Light, itself, now functions as the epistemology of space, giving it structure and meaning and allowing for new and imaginary ways of reading and experiencing the garden.

CONCLUSION: GARDENS WITH ATMOSPHERE

In the previous sections I have argued that the space of the *barzakh* is a space in motion. Through the lenses of travel we followed a path that opened up a new way of seeing as it passed through the familiar and unfamiliar, the ordinary and extraordinary, in a process of exterior and interior mappings of subject and object.

Firstly, we turned to Giuliana Bruno, who argued that this movement involves a landscape traversed, the movement of people from place to place, thus the opening of new spatial horizons. According to Bruno, it is in this spatial

¹⁰⁵ Rom Landau, *The Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi* (London: Ruskin House, 1959), 36, 37.

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty "Eye and Mind" 178. Smith, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 138. Tracing the similarities in Ibn al-Arabi's theories of *barzakh* and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh can make an interesting topic for further research.

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phenomenology that garden experience plays a very important role. Tracing the origin of the picturesque and the picturesque garden, she maps out its role in the making of a modern haptic space.¹⁰⁷ Bruno claims that the picturesque in the garden —reacted shifts from vista to vista as its rhythm of montage unravelled along a path of sequential movement.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, this montage of the picturesque became a matter of spectatorial emotion as the moving picturesque scene was composed in such a manner as to provide an emotional response, thus linking it to a landscape of emotions.

The picturesque garden involved both spectator and spectacle, for as the spectator moved through the garden her/his movement revealed, and in a sense recreated, the garden’s own shifting perspectives and viewpoints. Moving from the picturesque garden to an aesthetics of landscape and garden, Bruno concluded that the picturesque garden created a drama of changing sets which acted as a medium for emotional landscaping. Movement in the garden became the experiencing of a —sense” of place that embodied a —form of fluid, emotive geography.”¹⁰⁹

Most importantly, even though motion and travel were both seen as ways to expand a person’s sensate universe, understanding them both, as facets of a moving picturesque, contributed a tactile vision to these experiences. The picturesque, in this instance, is not an aesthetics of distance, but a sense of

¹⁰⁷ See Michel Conan, ed., *Landscape Design and the Experience of Motion* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003) for a critique of a still-dominant picturesque aesthetic in landscape design and how attention to motion may pave the way to a rejection of such a picturesque.

¹⁰⁸ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 194.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 202. Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, 38, states that the garden is the embodiment of motion as the primary motion of the visitor is echoed in the reciprocal motion of the garden, in its shapes, colours and masses that move in a continuous rearrangement.

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feeling through sight. Here, the eye is epidermic; it is a skin; sight becomes a sense of touch. Picturesque vision is haptic vision.¹¹⁰ Picturesque aesthetics serves as the vehicle for the shift toward a —haptic imaging and imagination . . . the fashioning of a haptic movement that is emotional.”¹¹¹

In the garden, strolling activated an intersubjective terrain of physical connections and emotional responses. Kinetic journeys across a fragmentary terrain generated kinaesthetic feelings . . . picturesque space was an aesthetics of fragments and discontinuities . . . architectural fragments contributed to the creation of a microcosmic heterotopia . . . one would navigate surprising collections of worlds of knowledge on the set of a garden stroll.¹¹²

In this aesthetics the garden is also writing its own story as it presents a different way of how its features and spaces can be viewed. Within a picturesque architectonics, spaces are simultaneously bounded and without boundaries as spectators are free to travel between and through these spaces. These picturesque spaces compositionally —articulate an epistemic of spatiovisual knowledge.”¹¹³ Concluding her argument, Bruno emphasises again that the kinetics of the garden is a sensory experience driven by the haptic. Strolling through the garden changes into a touching experience of feeling though the eyes while activating the senses in a —cumulative sequence of emotional responses.”¹¹⁴ The garden becomes a landscape to be experienced —as a series of sensational movements” and through this movement a person also makes sense of the garden. In this interaction the

¹¹⁰ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 202.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 202.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 202, 219.

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garden writes its own –sensate discourse,” which puts the —trajectory of vision” on a new route.¹¹⁵

Turning to Bruno’s rendering of a picturesque aesthetics has enabled me to confirm that movement through the garden allows for a discursive and relational encounter between self and world. Furthermore, it is in these encounters that we can position the space of the neutral, which Marin claims is a utopic space where the —nowhere” and the —every-where” meet in the —spatial play” of a relational encounter.

My reason for drawing attention to the neutral is that the garden and the neutral both share an important characteristic: both are concerned with emotional and imaginative spatial environments. If we see the garden as a space of the neutral, it is then also possible to argue that the garden, through its discursive geography, participates in its own narrative mapping of its spaces, thus participating in its own —spatial play” and becoming, in essence, a utopic. The garden becomes both subject and object on this path of perceptual movement, thereby participating in a process of phenomenological and epistemological story-telling. This aspect of the garden was already understood by the garden writer C.C. L. Hirschfeld in 1796:

¹¹⁵ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 219. See also Berleant, *Aesthetics and Environment*, 21-38, 77-79, for his discussion of an aesthetic engagement with landscape. He argues that a contextual or field model of experience exhibits concern with action and function, whereby people join in the movement of things, thus not only knowing it from the outside, but also becoming continuous with it. An aesthetic engagement with landscape recognises the primacy of our immediate perceptual experience, which is sensory yet coloured by a personal and cultural dimension. The garden becomes the coalescence of culture in material form whereby each garden tradition carries its own manner of engagement and which becomes expressed in the poetic nature of the aesthetic engagement.

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Yet life is nothing but a spectacle of flowers; everything resides in movement—burgeoning, flowering, fading and sprouting anew. Late summer, too, even the autumn of our lives, has flowers of its own, those that bloom longer and more vigorously than spring's filleting children. Happy is he who knows how to discover the blossoms that accompany each of life's seasons! Happy the man who, sheltered from the storms of the world, enjoys his evening in a restful garden and, in his wisdom, revives what the slow fading of fancy has left to wilt.¹¹⁶

Tim Ingold and Ibn al-Arabī, both, understood light as the base and creation of being. In fact Ingold wrote that light is the —sited, pre-objective foundation of existence, that commingling of the subject with the world without which there could be no visible things."¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that Hirschfeld also grasped this important aspect of light in his description of a garden aesthetics:

It is true that nature has an astonishing variety of colors and displays them with intensity and restraint alike, with a fiery brilliance and more muted degrees of brightness, through mixed blends, through the variation and unexpected incidence of *light*, through play and reflection—presenting a spectacle as splendid and beautiful as anything to be found in all creation.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld, *Theory of Garden Art*, trans. and ed. Linda B. Parshall (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 403-404.

¹¹⁷ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 265. See also the rest of his discussion on Merleau-Ponty's exposé on light as not really a medium we see, rather, that we see in light, thus the experience of light is absolutely real. —"No longer is it a matter of speaking about space and light, but of making space and light, which are *there*, speak to us." Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 138. See also the following two interesting books on light and its role in representation and perception: Elana Agazzi, Enrico Giannetto and Franco Giudice, eds., *Representing Light Across Art and Sciences: Theories and Practices* (Goettingen: V&R Unipress, 2010) and Michael Asgaard Anderson and Henrik Oxvig, eds., *Paradoxes of Appearing: Essays on Art, Architecture and Philosophy* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2009), see especially the essay of Renaud Barbaras "Invisibility at the Heart of Appearance: On Perception, Art and Desire," 169-185, for his reading of Merleau-Ponty on perception.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157. (Italics mine) See also Gernot Böhme's mentioning of Hirschfeld's descriptions of how natural arrangements in the garden can produce a certain quality of feeling through

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My interest in Hirschfeld's descriptions is that he offers us a garden experienced, the garden as movement and light, a meeting ground between sensing and sensed and most importantly the garden as the *barzakh*. Gernot Böhme calls this an example of a new aesthetics, the production of atmosphere and a theory of perception in which perception is —understood as the experience of the presence of person, objects and environment.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Böhme's description of atmosphere clearly illustrates that atmosphere is, in itself, also a *barzakh*.

What is unique and also theoretically complex is that the term describes a typical in-between phenomenon. Atmospheres stand between subjects and objects: one can describe them as object-like emotions, which are randomly cast into space. But one must at the same time describe them as subjective, insofar as they are nothing without a discerning Subject. But their great value lies exactly in this in-betweenness.¹²⁰

Atmospheres, according to Böhme, have a certain character according to which we can divide them into moods, phenomena of synaesthesia, communicative and social conventional atmospheres and suggestions for emotions. An atmosphere's character is the means by which it conveys and communicates certain feelings to a person as a participating subject. However, as Böhme points out, the phenomenon of atmospheres is in itself vague and intangible as they are primarily totalities, which imbue and tinge the whole world or something specific in a certain light, as well as unifying

the choice of objects colours, sounds and movement in –Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 123-124.

¹¹⁹ Böhme, –Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” 116.

¹²⁰ Gernot Böhme, –Acoustic Atmospheres,” 15. See also the rest of his discussion on the understanding of atmospheres in the field of Production Aesthetics and Reception Aesthetics.

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many diverse impressions into a single emotive feeling.¹²¹ At the same time atmospheres are also completely subjective, as a person in order to define an atmosphere's character, has to bodily experience it. Atmospheres are —sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space.”¹²² As pointed out before, atmospheres are classic intermediate phenomena, standing between subject and object and within this relational encounter they achieve ontological status.

It becomes clear, according to these arguments, that the *barzakh* is not only movement, but also atmosphere, as both relate to a person's imagination, to her/his power of representation. The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra are not static objects nor are their visitors passive spectators. As Böhme observes, these spaces generated by light, sound and movement are —no longer something perceived at a distance, but something within which one is enclosed.”¹²³

I want to conclude this chapter by turning to Mikel Dufrenne. Not only does his aesthetic theory reaffirm our own arguments that recognizing the spatial qualities of the *barzakh* is to recognise these gardens' aesthetic atmosphere, but it is in his analysis of the sensuous that we find traces of the unity promised by Ibn al-Arabi in finding or witnessing. Dufrenne claims that an

¹²¹ Gernot Böhme, “The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmosphere,” *Cresson: The Centre for Research on Sonic Space & Urban Environment*, www.cresson.archi.fr/PUBLI/.../AMB8-confGBohme-eng.pdf (accessed September 15, 2011). See also Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” 120-121.

¹²² Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” 122.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

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aesthetic experience is a subject being present *in* perception. It is a perceptual experience in which there is, firstly, a bodily encounter with the sensuous, followed by a level of representation and imagination and ending in reflection and feeling, which ultimately flows into understanding and knowledge. Most importantly, however, is that feeling moves reflection away from an objectifying gaze into a —sympathetic” partnership between spectacle and spectator and it is through feeling that the spectator becomes present *in* the aesthetic object. Dufrenne claims that through this dialectical relationship a —*no* world” is expressed whereby the depth of the expressed world and the depth of the beholder of the world unite.

Their unity is both the perceived unity of appearance as rigorously composed and the felt unity of a world represented by the appearance or, rather, emanating from it in such a way that what is represented itself signifies totality and is converted into a world. . . . Therefore a higher principle of unity comes to the aesthetic object from the fact that it is capable of expression, that is, from the fact that it signifies not only by representing but, through that which it represents, by producing in the perceiver a certain impression. . . . Thus the aesthetic object manifests a certain quality which words cannot translate but which communicates itself in arousing a feeling. . . . This quality proper to the work . . . is a world atmosphere.¹²⁴

It is also in this —*no* world” that we can find traces of Ibn-al-Arabī's epistemology of the unity of being, for the unity identified by Dufrenne belongs *a priori* to both subject and object and carries within it its own theory of knowledge.

¹²⁴ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, xxx, 177, 178.

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Feeling is as deeply embedded in the object as it is in the subject. . . . The logical sense of the *a priori* slides into the ontological. What was before a condition of possibility becomes a property of being. To be at once a determination of subject and object, the *a priori* must be a characteristic of being, which is anterior to subject and object and makes their affinity possible. . . . In its fullest meaning, it is the real itself. Aesthetic experience can thus become the basis for reflection on the accord between man and the real.¹²⁵

Thus, our *rihla* through the spaces of the garden showed us that the garden as the *barzakh* is ultimately —apoetic phenomenology, because we are dealing with the art of bringing something to appearance.”¹²⁶ Through the mediation of the body and the animation of the garden, feelings, emotions, imagination and representations all contribute to the visitor’s aesthetic and lived experience. Knowledge production becomes the construction of meaning through an aesthetic encounter wherein both subject and object participate. Placed within a garden utopic, the *barzakh* allows for the unity of this experience to project itself onto a sensuous discourse, which moves it away from mere description into a multilayered emotional landscape that ultimately, I submit, is the narrative of the *Ajā’ib* for it gives voice to the *barzakh*.

¹²⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, xxxii, 455.

¹²⁶ Böhme, “The Art of the Stage Set as Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmosphere,” 8.

Chapter Five

The Alhambra: Presence and Absence

And presence? It always manifests itself in a form, but the form, taken on its own is empty, and thus absence. Content taken on its own is formless, and thus absence. Form and content, when separated, are evasions of presence. This presupposes and implies an act: the *poietic act*. And that also implies an attachment to *being*, to the fact of being and the possibility of a plenitude that is never fixed never definitive. . . . Presence is not met with except as part of a scenario, which it interrupts. It evolves within representations, and transcends them. . . . Play, like knowledge, like work, like the search for love (for the Other) are only moments in which absence reveals itself, and presence appears. The poietic act cannot avoid them, but traverses them. This movement is always liable to stop at a representation (what we call blockage).¹

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What about presence? To start with let's call it a thing, a being, and oeuvre (but none of these things fully elucidates the act) which reveals itself, so that it can be seen, grasped and loved (or hated!). It can be a (human) person, a thing (a tree, a flower, a stone), or several persons, a place (a rural landscape, a city), a building (monument), a piece of music or an event. The variety of presences is infinite, but the word has a universal and univocal import: intensification of experience, a force that is persuasive without being brutal (whether in the form of irruption, impregnation, choice, etc.)²

≈

Space thus conceptualized is defined as the play of absences and presences, represented by the alternation of light and shade, the luminous and the nocturnal. Object in space simulate the appearance and disappearance of presences in the most profound way. Time is thus punctuated by presences. They give it rhythm, but it also contains things that are not what they seem, representations that simulate/dissimulate.³

¹ Henry Lefebvre, "Triads and Dyads" in *Key Writings*, edited by Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman (New York: Continuum, 2003), 52,

² *Ibid.*, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, 56

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INTRODUCTION

With his teachings on the *barzakh*, Ibn al-Arabi provided us with a multifaceted concept that enables us to readdress how specific spaces, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, produce meaning through an encounter with reality that is both mental and physical. By placing Ibn al-Arabi in conversation with modern theorists on space I have shown that the space of the *barzakh* is not an alien concept, but that it finds echoes in Michel's Foucault theories of heterotopia, Edward Soja's Thirdspace and Louis Marin's neutral, all of which emphasise the paradoxical nature of a space both different and the same, or in other words, both real and unreal. From these concepts I have established that the space of the *barzakh* is, on the one hand, a metaphorical space wherein the characteristics associated with the *barzakh* can be developed into a figurative narrative, a utopic, allowing it to be decoded and read by those people who know its signs and symbols. On the other hand, the space of the *barzakh* is a space that engages the traveller in an emotional journey of sense experience, whereby the actual, physical architectonics and topography of a space, such as the garden, involve its visitor physically through an aesthetic experience of atmosphere.

Before returning to the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra it is important to draw the readers' attention back to the arguments of Louis Marin. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the metaphorical space of the *barzakh*, similar to Marin's explanation of Utopia, is not a discourse of the concept of the

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barzakh, but rather a —discourse of figure: a particular figurative mode of discourse. It is fiction, fable-construction, ‘anthropomorphized’ narratives, ‘concrete’ descriptions, exotic, novel, and pictorial representation: these are all of its nature.”⁴ The *barzakh*, as text, frames a figurative space that is not static and still, but rather it functions on multiple levels, whereby a “path and movement of contradiction” is marked out. Discussing the space of the neutral, Marin claims:

The theory of the neutral would permit placeless contradiction in discourse to have limitless force. And yet it upholds its productive power, forever shifting and impossible to mobilize in one single figure. This theory, finally, would entail utopic practice, introducing into narrative history and geography the sudden distance that breaks apart closely held spatial and temporal surfaces. Lightninglike, before coming to a hard and fixed image in the utopic figure and ‘ideal’ representation, the *other* appears: limitless, contradiction.⁵

It is also my belief that this play between contradictions, whereby the traveller becomes absorbed in the dynamics of sighting, is the spirit of the *„Ajāʿib*, or pre-modern Islamic travel narrative. On the *Ajāʿib*, Carra de Vaux in the late nineteenth century wrote:

The word ‘Marvel’ does not represent something that does not exist or has never existed. Marvels are monuments, facts, beings such as those met within geography and history. It is not sure that they are true; it is even less sure that they are false: they are above all difficult to confirm.⁶

⁴ Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (New York: Humanity Books, 1984), 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶ Carra de Vaux, Bernard, Introduction to anonymous *Abrégé des merveilles* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1898), 18. Quoted in Houari Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 227, 228.

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The conceptual nature of the *„Ajāʿib* offers us limitless theoretical possibilities to engage with in order to broaden our understanding of knowledge production. Within the genre of the *„Ajāʿib*, knowledge production moves between physical reality and the narrative production of this encounter. Through this production the initial encounter with reality is reworked into a meaningful and understandable experience that includes both physical description and interpretation. However, the *„Ajāʿib* with its polymorphous quality challenges the emphasis of modern scholarship on interpretation as the search for one essential truth, bringing us back to the fact that even before interpretation there had to be a certain presence that had an immediate impact on the observer.

The *„Ajāʿib* can, thus, be considered as a description of a heterotopia; it is essentially the description of a place that is other or different. However, as explained in Chapter Two, this otherness is not an emphasis on something out of place but rather an otherness in relation to the Other, for it is the condition of the traveller to be displaced from her/his home by being in another place, that is simultaneously physically real, but also imaginary —*ureal*.” It is in this relationship, this space between true and false, that we situate the narrative of the *„Ajāʿib*. By travelling through this space we become wayfarers, entering onto a path where the production of presence fills the gap between perception and interpretation. The *Ajāʿib* is, thus, to use Ibn al-Arabi’s words:

That which brings both worlds together. It is the *barzakh* that makes them distinct through its directions, or through the fact that it brings

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everything together. It makes them distinct between highness and lowness in respect of that which displays traces and that which receives traces.

The world of *barzakh* displays traces more intensely than the world of sensation, for it displays traces in the world of sensation in the same way sensation does, but, sensation is not able to display traces in the imagination. (II 609.17)⁷

Although on numerous occasions throughout this thesis mention has been made of interpretation, I once again want to draw attention to Ibn al-ʿArabī's thoughts. In his comparative study of Derrida and Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ian Almond states that Ibn al-ʿArabī viewed texts as opportunities to explore. Texts are not limited to the decoding of secrets or the finding of one truth. Interpretation is a moment of 'opening up' (*futūḥāt*) rather than closing down."⁸ Ibn al-ʿArabī, also, often linked the act of interpretation with metaphors of travel and crossing. Meaning for Ibn al-ʿArabī is essentially transitive; it is found in the movement from perception to that of finding. Similar to travel, it carries with it elements of uncertainty and adventure. Interpretation forms part of an encounter with something that is radically other in relation to that which surrounds it, and is best expressed by Ibn al-ʿArabī's explanation of the interpretation of dreams.

Through the science of interpretation a person comes to know what is meant by the forms of images when they are displayed to him and when

⁷ William, C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-ʿArabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 260.

⁸ Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn ʿArabī* (London: Routledge, 2004), 79, 80.

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sense perception causes them to rise in his imagination during sleep, wakefulness, absence, or annihilation. (II 152.5)⁹

Reporting (*ikhbār*) about things is called expression (*ḥabāra*) and interpreting dreams is called interpretation (*taʿbīr*). This is because the expresser/interpreter crosses over (*ḥubūr*) by means of what he says. In other words, by means of his words he passes (*jawāz*) from the presence (*ḥaḍra*) of his own self to the self of the listener. Hence he transfers his words from imagination to imagination, since the listener imagines to the extent of his understanding. (III 454.1)¹⁰

Almond explains that Ibn al-ʿArabī sees interpretation as the transfer of symbols from imagination to imagination or from images to images. The distinction between the expresser and the interpreter, or the producer of signs and the reader of signs, is erased by the location of both these words' etymologies in the same root, *ḥubūr*, or "crossing over." Even though Almond is discussing Ibn al-ʿArabī's hermeneutics of the Qur'an, thus focussing on the written language, his argument shows that interpretation, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, need not be restricted to the written language, but that it takes place in all encounters with reality. Interpretation always involves the crossing of a "certain threshold between self and other" and becomes "no longer a matter of extraction, but rather a point of embarkation." In the absence of any single secret meaning, there is an "infinity of possibilities" to be explored, which makes interpretation adventures to be embarked upon and not puzzles to be solved.¹¹

⁹ William C Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1989), 119.

¹⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 119.

¹¹ Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction*, 80, 91.

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In the way of a traditional *Ajā'ib*, the focus of this chapter does not fall explicitly on fixed modes of interpretation, but rather, it is an exploration of presence, or in the words of Ibn al-Arabi, the traces displayed by the *barzakh* of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra and how they are transferred into words and film. In the previous chapter, I have argued that passage or movement through the gardens involve an aesthetic experience whereby subject and object are intrinsically linked together in the moment of perception. Although the garden as object is a palimpsest of multiple historical layers experienced by a subject, who is also not isolated from her/his own history, it is in the physical encounter between subject and object that something becomes present. The garden becomes a space where the movement between object and subject is played out.

Ibn al-Arabi writes that —Knowledge of the absent is the most precious of all knowledge and best at bringing presence.” (II 520.25)¹² This chapter builds upon the idea of absence and presence by exploring the *barzakh* of the garden as a producer of presence. By looking at two specific encounters with the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, I will show how these gardens, within the presence of the imagination, participates in what Martin Seel calls an —aesthetics of appearing.”¹³ According to Seel, the concept of appearing is in essence tied up with the way we encounter the world. Attentiveness to appearing involves on a deeper level also attentiveness to the self. Seel explains that it is by perceiving the profound particularities of the sensuous

¹² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 308.

¹³ Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, trans. by John Farrell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

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that a person also gains insight into the —indeterminable presence of their lives.” He claims that artworks develop their —transgressive energy from their presence as sense-catching forms,” as through them new presences arise linking past and present presences.¹⁴ The gardens of the Alhambra, similar to Seel’s works of art, on the one hand, engages the spectator aesthetically through their sensuous presence, but on the other hand the spectator, by opening herself/himself to the presence, finds within the encounter the lingering of past presences and the promise of future presences.

My aim in this chapter is to trace the subtle and paradoxical ways in which the architectonics or topography of a *barzakhian* space is made perceptible in representation. In keeping with my use of the „*Ajāʿib*” as theoretical analogy, my first example is a genre of travel writing, which Giuliana Bruno explains as a type of writing that —moved’ its readers, taking them along paths known and unknown as it recalled, imagined, incited, and sometimes replaced an actual journey.”¹⁵ Although much have been written on the Alhambra, in Spanish as well as in English, which Washington Irving’s *The Alhambra* is perhaps the best known, I have chosen the travel narrative of Sally Shivnan, —*Gringa Morisca*,” because it perfectly captures the strongly visual and experiential qualities of a picturesque journey through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.¹⁶

¹⁴ Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, xi.

¹⁵ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002) 177, 186.

¹⁶ Sally Shivnan, —*Gringa Morisca*,” in *The Best Travel Writing 2005: True Stories from Around the World*, eds. James O’Reilly, Larry Habegger and Sean O’Reilly (San Francisco: Traveller’s Tales, 2005), 125-137. I refer the reader to Pere Gifra-Adroher, *Between History and Romance: Travel Writing on Spain in the Early Nineteenth Century United States*

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My second example, similar to that of the travel narrative, forms part of a —spatio-visual architectonics,” which Bruno explains as the embodiment in film of an —artisticwork of visualization and the mobilization of (narrative) space.”¹⁷ The short film by Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, translates Ibn al-Arabi’s theories of the qualities of light and darkness, stasis and movement and inside and outside, in order to give us a visual and sensory display of these characteristics of the *barzakh* when aesthetically mapped onto the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.¹⁸

Ibn al-Arabi wrote: —Nothing enters more into the property of negation than the impossible thing. Nevertheless, there is a Presence that stipulates it, gives it form, and shapes it. Nothing accepts form-giving and shaping save what is there so the impossible is there.” (IV 410.30)¹⁹ Before I can trace how presence is given form by the garden on the one hand and how the garden is given presence on the other, I will firstly turn to a short discussion on presence and presence effects.

To begin with I will define presence by turning to Martin Heidegger’s definition and understanding of presence effects. Heidegger’s description of —being” and —being present” also underpins the arguments in the book *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*,

(Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2000) and Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000)

¹⁷ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 186.

¹⁸ Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, short film, directed by Marie Menken, (USA: Gryphon Films, 1961) <http://www.ubu.com/film/menken.html> These examples will not be discussed in terms of media, literature or film studies, I have chosen them purely to serve as examples to show how the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, which through its architecture can be defined as a *barzakh*, transcend these physical qualities to recast them in an atmospheric interpretation of those spaces.

¹⁹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 45. (IV 410.30).

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wherein the authors explore presence in terms of notions of emergence and relations. Important for this discussion is the introduction to the book by Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks and the chapter on presence effects by Josette Féral. It is, however, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's thoughts on the production of presence and the question of meaning that informs the main argument of this chapter. Gumbrecht's arguments asking for different modes of constructing reality, together with Martin Seel's theories on aesthetics of appearing, will aid me in establishing a theoretical base for claiming that the space of the *barzakh* leaves traces that can be captured through the presence of light and shadow or movement and stasis, without always turning to representational and interpretative enquiry.

As I have already discussed the importance of bodily presence in the aesthetic appreciation of the garden in previous chapters, this chapter turns explicitly to the recognition of presence effects in literature and film. The last section of this chapter will, therefore, be devoted to my two examples, Sally Shivnan's "*Gringa Morisca*" and Marie Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. Firstly, I will make a short reference to Louis Marin's thoughts on place and its representation in narrative. Marin's arguments allow us to trace how the Alhambra features prominently within a narrative of European Romanticism, changing later, especially within Spain, into a narrative more concerned with politics and the public sphere. Finally, I will introduce each example individually and proceed by highlighting how the garden as the *barzakh* makes itself visible, in both the written narrative and the film adaptation, through an emphasis on absence and presence.

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PRESENCE

The word *presence* is defined by the English dictionary as the fact or condition of being present, the part of space within one's immediate vicinity, a person or thing that is present, thus something present of a visible or concrete nature. It can also mean a noteworthy quality of poise and effectiveness, or something, a feeling, felt or believed to be present.²⁰ Even from this definition it becomes clear that the word presence carries within itself a multi layered ambiguity. On the one hand, presence refers to a spatial relationship between a person, the world and its objects. Being present involves a tangible relationship between body and world, but on the other hand this relationship produces certain feelings and emotions, which finally leads to the attribution of meaning to that which is present.²¹

In her discussion on how to define present effects, Josette Féral distinguishes between several epistemic fields related to the concept of presence. Firstly, there is the existential field that refers to a person being there, physically present in a certain space surrounded by other things that also take up that space. Within this being present there arises a second level of meaning, that which touches the *quality of my being*: a way of being present that not only affirms my presence but underlines the particular aspect that I am not only present, but also have presence, which is not the same

²⁰ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/presence>

²¹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), xiii, xiv.

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thing.”²² Féral points out that within this second-level meaning there is a movement away from the verb —*ā* be” (being present) to the verb —*t*have” (having presence).

From these two meanings, but distinctly different from both of them, Féral claims, a person can also draw a third meaning. This third meaning is an effect of presence, or an impression of presence, thus those same experiences that would have taken place in the real presence of a person or object are invoked. According to Féral, what links these three manifestations of presence is that in all three —*p*presence’ means the feeling that a body is present—generally a living body (often a person, but this can also be applied to objects) that the subject has the impression it is really there.”²³

Tracing the word presence back to Arabic shows that the Arabic word for presence is *wujūd*, which also means finding, discovery, being and existence.²⁴ As shown in the previous chapters, the term *wujūd* is frequently used by Ibn al-*Arabi* to refer to being and existence, but most often, as William Chittick points out, Ibn al-*Arabi* uses the word *wujūd* to render the word —*if*ding.” He explains that Ibn al-*Arabi*’s main concern is not the mental concept of Being, but rather the experience of Being, where —*if*ding” becomes at one and the same time —*t*perceive and to be that which truly is. . . . Finding . . . is never just epistemological. It is fundamentally

²² Josette Féral, —*h*w to Define Presence Effects,” in *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*, eds. Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks (London: Routledge, 2012), 29-31.

²³ Féral, —*h*w to Define Presence Effects, 30.

²⁴ J. Milton Cowan, ed., *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 1050.

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ontological. Being precedes knowledge in God as in the world; nothing knows until it first exists. . . . Both knowledge and being are finding.”²⁵

Ibn al-Arabi’s presence as “hiding” implies a certain kind of movement as it is a tracing of that which is absent through its manifestation into a witnessing of presence. Through this movement presence is established, and in the words of Martin Heidegger, it is established as “truth.” Heidegger claims that “when something objectively present has been discovered, it is encountered most purely by just looking at it and letting it be encountered in itself.”²⁶

What mattered then, and still does, is to bring out the Being of beings—though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being itself—that is to say: the presence of present beings, the two-fold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness. This is what makes its claim on man, calling him to his essential being.²⁷

This means that looking always discovers colors, hearing always discovers tones. What is in the purest and most original sense “true”—that is, what only discovers in such a way that it can never cover up anything—is pure *noein*, straightforwardly observant apprehension of the simplest determinations of the being of beings as such.²⁸

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht explains that Heidegger’s truth is something that happens. It is found in the double movement of hiding and concealing, for Being is simultaneously both unconcealed and hidden in the happening of truth.

²⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 3, 4.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 244.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 30

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 29.

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Being, as it is being unconcealed, for example, in a work of art, is not something spiritual or something conceptual. Being is not a meaning. Being belongs to the dimension of things. . . . If Being has the character of a thing, this means it has substance and that, therefore it occupies space. . . . Having a substance and thus occupying space also implies the possibility of Being unfolding a movement: Being as *phusis* is the merging sway.²⁹

According to Gumbrecht, this movement is also multidimensional as it is both ~~vertical~~ "vertical" (sway) and ~~horizontal~~ "horizontal" (idea/look). The vertical movement of Being is simply its being present, its emergence into being and thus its occupation of space. The horizontal movement of Being is found in the perception of being. It is Being as being perceived, whereby Being is ~~offering~~ offering itself to somebody's view (as an appearance and as an object,³⁰ as something that moves toward or against an observer).³⁰ In addition, there is a dimension of withdrawal whereby that which has appeared no longer has the character of an object, but instead is caught up in a process of emergence and relations. It is in this relational totality of the presence of things that a context of meaningfulness arises.

However the word being now no longer means what something *is*. We hear being as a verb, as in being present, and being absent.³¹ To be means to perdure and persist. But this says more than to last and abide.³¹ It is in being means it persists in its presence,³¹ and its persistence concerns and moves us.³¹

²⁹ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 68. *Phusis* initially the Greek word for nature develops in Heideggerian thought into self-emergence. It is the continual emerging of being from itself, while continually returning to itself. *Phusis* does not only signify the presence of being, but also to the same degree it is self-withholding. See Bruce V. Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New York: Humanity Books, 1995) for a detailed discussion on this subject.

³⁰ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 69.

³¹ Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 95.

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In the preceding paragraphs I have moved from a simple definition of presence as something physically present, and presence as a specific portrayal of a certain mood, towards the idea that presence is not only “*showing*” and “*truth*,” but that it is ultimately the experience of Being. It is in this experience, presence as “*unhappening of truth*,” that a person sees things in a different way, far removed from preconceived ideas and distinctions. The sheer presence of the “*thing*” prompts other possibilities of its “*thingness*” to open up and only then does a person “*feel*” and assigns meaning.³²

In *Archaeologies of Presence*, the editors claim that Martin Heidegger’s understanding of “*being*” and “*being present*” are imbued with “*notions* of emergence and relation, and in which ‘*presence*’ to and of the other is articulated as process: as an act of persistence. . . . Here, ‘*presence*’ is implicitly configured as *in movement*, as that which perceptibly exceeds the object and is more fittingly associated with dynamic and changing perceptions, and so the structures of consciousness.”³³ It is in this movement from nonexistence into existence that presence is established and phenomenologically experienced. Presence opens up a world as it not only shows something or let it be present, but even after this showing it remains and moves a person in imagination and thought. For Heidegger this world that is opened up by presence is not merely a collection of things that are familiar, or unfamiliar, neither is it just an imagined framework of our own

³² Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 77.

³³ Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks, ed., *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being* (London: Routledge, 2012), 10.

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representations. It is in presence that all —things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits.”³⁴ This, in the words of Ibn al-Arabī is the *barzakh*:

The cosmos is two worlds and the Presence is two Presences, though a third Presence is born between the two of them from the totality. The first Presence is the Presence of the absent, and it possesses a world called the world of the absent. The second Presence is the Presence of sensation and the witnessed; its world is called the world of the witnessed and it is perceived by eyesight, while the world of the absent is perceived by insight.

That which is born from the coming together of the two is a Presence and a world. The Presence is the Presence of imagination and the world is the world of imagination. (III 42.5)³⁵

It is the imaginal station that has no *wujūd* save in the imagination between the world of the witnessed and the world of the absent. (III 78.4)³⁶

I have argued that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra is a *barzakh*, for these gardens physically occupy a space that shares in the characteristics of a *barzakhian* space, as explained by Ibn al-Arabī. Mentally, these gardens can be considered as liminal or relational spaces whereby they form part of individual or societal navigations of self and other. In this instance, by traversing the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, the scenery becomes a

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 43, 44.

³⁵ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 258.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

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sign-system, or in Hugh Silverman's words, a limit-text read by us in accordance with our historical and collective representations.³⁷

However, as Ibn al-Arabi pointed out, interpretation is always part of our encounter with the world, but firstly there is an experience of presence and my emphasis, in this chapter, falls on the ways the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra's scenery and architectural qualities draw the eye's gaze to reveal an extraordinary presence. I am, thus, concentrating here on an aesthetic experience of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra in terms of what Seel calls an "aesthetic of appearing." Most importantly, though, I am not focussing on a first-hand experience of the gardens, but rather on identifying the presence effects in a specific narrative and film. By reading the travel narrative and viewing the short film for what Hans Gumbrecht calls "Stimmung," we become sensitive to the way the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra surround us physically and emotionally with movement, light and sound.³⁸

AESTHETICS OF APPEARING

Before turning to Sally Shivnan's "Gringa Morisca" and Marie Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, I want to touch on Martin Seel's arguments for an aesthetic of appearing. Seel's thesis, in a certain sense, echoes all we have discussed so far about the *barzakh* as a different way of encountering the world, but reassigns these ideas to a contemporary analysis of

³⁷ Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions: After Phenomenology and Structuralism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press,) 1997, 326-337. Refer back to Chapter Two.

³⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Reading for the *Stimmung*? About the Ontology of Literature Today" *Boundary 2* 35.3 (2008): 213-221.

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aesthetics. Although I have turned to Ibn al-Arabī's *barzakh* as an analytical tool for an alternative way of encountering space, Seel's aesthetics of appearing turns the *barzakh* into a specific aesthetic way of experiencing these spaces. It also reaffirms my earlier argument that the courtyard gardens participate in a picturesque aesthetics involving both the gardens and visitor in the experience.

Seel proposes that being attentive to appearing means simultaneously to be attentive to ourselves. He explains that apprehending things as they are in the moment of sensuous awareness is a real way for a person to encounter the world.³⁹ Importantly, though, the mode of attentiveness Seel proposes includes and incorporates interpretative and epistemic attentiveness. However, aesthetic perception, as I have also pointed out in Chapter Four, is first and foremost a sensuous encounter with the object involved. It is not only a witnessing of the object as it appears to our senses in the here and now. According to Seel, this momentary attentiveness to this witnessing is also, simultaneously, an attentiveness to the —~~situation~~ situation of *perception* of their appearing—and thus reflection on the immediate *presence* in which this perception is executed."⁴⁰ Clearly then, as Seel argues, aesthetic consideration to our external surroundings includes attentiveness to ourselves, in the present moment of the here and now, but also, sometimes, an attentiveness to situations where we are not present in the moment here and now, but an attentiveness —~~to~~ to a moment now and never."⁴¹ Seel claims

³⁹ Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, xi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

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that aesthetic interest is unconsciously part of the desire of human beings to be — perceptually aware of the presence of one's own being. . . . A particular accomplishment of aesthetic intuition is to make present in their nontransparency the unrecognised and unused possibilities that emerge there. No consciousness of one's present is possible without aesthetic consciousness."⁴²

Ibn al-Arabi once wrote: —The [present] state is only a playground in which we have a place to run." (IV 306.20)⁴³ Ibn al-Arabi's statement that the present is a playground in which we are free to run, thus in which we are free to explore, discover and become aware, is the perfect analogy for understanding the presence of the *barzakh*. It is in the play, or rather, in the openness to the play of light and shadow, silence and movement, in the space of the *barzakh* that a person becomes aware or obtains a — sense of the here and now of one's own life."⁴⁴ Within this relationship, Seel argues, we move away from a purely logical and theoretical frame of mind, for attending to what is appearing makes it possible to experience and know an even richer dimension of reality.

We should not lose a taste for the moment, for it is this aptitude that makes it possible to comprehend uncontrollable presence not as a lack of meaning or being but as an opportunity to get in touch with ourselves in a way that we must leave aside in the course of logical thought and action.⁴⁵

⁴² Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 16.

⁴³ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 180.

⁴⁴ Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. Seel continues in chapter two of *Aesthetics of Appearing* to give a detailed analysis of what he believes encompasses such an aesthetic. See specifically his arguments

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Although I have discussed my understanding of the definition of presence in the previous section, I want to, for a moment, return to the concept of presence by calling attention to Seel's viewpoints on what presence entails. Seel defines presence in its basic sense as a —continuum of (the states of) things and events as they are perceptibly present in a sensuous manner within the surroundings of a human being."⁴⁶ Importantly, however, Seel points out that presence is not merely established in the perception of objects that are present, but that presence is —aropen (that is, an immeasurable, unfathomable, and uncontainable) horizon of *encounter* with what is there—an encounter that senses, acts, and acquires knowledge."⁴⁷ In this encounter one can open oneself up to a mode of aesthetic attentiveness to the momentary play of appearances and distance oneself from future acts or past memories. In this mode of aesthetic awareness, an intuitive awareness of presence arises, an awareness of being and time: being here and now is also my here and now.⁴⁸

In agreement with Seel, we can speak of presence as a different mode of constructing reality. An aesthetic of appearing allows for the production of presence as, to use Gumbrecht's phrase, an —epiphany of form."⁴⁹ In this

on perception and aesthetic perception, which he claims is not —perceiving of" or —perceiving that," but —perceiving as." Aesthetic perception perceives something in its —unreduced presence." (25) See also his discussion on the concept of play as being a double play between perception and that which is being perceived. Firstly there is a play of appearance, the sensuous presence of the object followed by a play of perception, where a sense of the object's phenomenal individuality is developed. (31)

⁴⁶ Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32, 33. See also his commentary on his definition that the aesthetic appearing of an object is a play of its appearances, 37- 47.

⁴⁹ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, —Epiphany of Form: On the Beauty of Team Sports," *New Literary History* 30.2 (1999): 351-372.

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moment, when a person unexpectedly realises something extraordinary and important, there is a movement between appearance and perception that generates intense emotions and feelings, which in that moment push strictly interpretative and meaning questions into the background. From these propositions, it becomes clear that presence, as an aesthetic of appearing, is the reality of the *barzakh*, for it is brought forth in the play between nothingness and something, not-yet and not-anymore, movement and stasis and ultimately real and unreal. It is surely this power of presence to define and create that Henri Lefebvre had in mind when he wrote:

Play recalls forgotten depths and summons them up to the light of day. By making them stay within the everyday, it encompasses art and many other things as well. It uses appearances and illusions which—for a marvellous moment—become more real than real. And with play another reality is born, not a separate one, but one which is lived in the everyday, alongside the functional. . . . Play is a lavish provider of presences and presences.⁵⁰

The play of appearances is ultimately a relational encounter between form and experience, which can result in an aesthetic presence spilling over, or transcending, its physical surroundings and encompassing real and imaginal worlds.

In this chapter, however, my focus shifts from a personal and physical experience of the garden's atmosphere to tracing its presence effects as captured in language and film. I am, consequently, exploring the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra in terms of an aesthetic of appearing, or a

⁵⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, Volume 2, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 203.

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production of presence in which the sensuous imagination moves us beyond the situation of aesthetic perception.⁵¹ What I am proposing here, then, is to identify how the presence of the *barzakh* as captured in words and camera in effect remains an experience of the lingering play of absence and presence in the gardens themselves.

THE COURTYARD GARDENS OF THE ALHAMBRA IN LITERATURE

Louis Marin proposes that place plays an important role in the movement from phenomenal experience to the translating of that experience in words. Highlighting the —place of narrative,” Marin stresses that there is a close link between language, space and the body. It is in a specific place that the body becomes subject to a phenomenal experience. This experience is then assigned, through the —speaking body,” a specific message imbued with personal and social nuances. It is through this movement that place, as the space of the experience’s origin, is transformed through language, into a place of reference.⁵²

What is place? A fragment of space endowed with its own unity, a space inhabited or visited, a dwelling. Houses, temples, tombs are places; so are dining rooms, bedrooms, gardens, palaces. A place signifies the *relation* of a given space to the function or characteristic of the being that is indicated and exhibited there in its absolute individuality; in other words, a place is the relation of a space to the only epiphany of being within it: the body. A place is a body-space, the return of space to the pre-objective state it has when its signifying form emerges in perceptual experience, the perceptible experience of the emerging of its

⁵¹ See Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing*, 69-87.

⁵² Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford University Press, 1994), 126.

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significance, thus the return of space to a state of origination. From this point on places belong to narrative, to the discourse (of which they are the primitive and fundamental moments) in which speech can refer to experience; they form networks of proper or common nouns that are guideposts mapping the act of narrative in narrative utterance . . . place signifies the precise point at which signifying experience accedes to discursive-cultural signification.⁵³

It becomes clear, from Marin's arguments, that the transformation of place into narrative, in this instance, the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra into a travel narrative describing the gardens, also implies the transformation of space into a narrative discourse. Through this transformation a specific topography (the space of the garden) is transformed into a specific theme or topos (beauty, love, power or paradise). Important to note is that this movement of a "place in space" into a "place of speech" most often results in a figure that has to be decoded and interpreted.⁵⁴

If we keep Marin's statement in mind, it is not difficult to plot the transformation of the Alhambra from physical architectural construct, built by the Moors, into a literary figure of exoticism and difference. Gerhart Hoffmeister argues that the Alhambra entered the European Romantic era during a time when the young geniuses were at odds with the problems brought about by civilization. Not only were they searching for something different, the simple life, thus embarking on picturesque travel adventures, but also the return to a more heroic life. Moorish Spain became the focal point of their romantic fantasies as it represented not only the Orient but also

⁵³ Marin, *On Representation*, 126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

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the heroic Middle Ages, fusing Gothic Christianity and the Orient. Hoffmeister argues that Alhambraism presents one of the finest examples of romantic exoticism. It became a symbol of longing deeply etched on the hearts of the romantic poets, symbolizing different aspects of their romantic preoccupations. On a literary level Alhambraism symbolised the ideals and aspirations of these poets who could only look back to the past glories of European chivalry.

On a personal level, Alhambraism could inspire the search for a lost childhood innocence and pilgrimage to a site of childhood dreams and happiness. The Alhambra could, therefore, be a symbol of paradise lost and a symbol symbolising the nostalgic longing to return to a “~~otter~~” time and place. Washington Irving structured his narrative on the Alhambra in the framework of a journey through Spain. In Irving’s narrative the Alhambra stood as a symbol for the lost innocence of childhood and a metaphor for paradise lost.⁵⁵ According to Irving,

These are simple details of simple pleasures; it is the nature of the place alone that gives them interest and importance. I tread haunted ground, and am surrounded by romantic associations. From earliest boyhood, when, on the banks of the Hudson I first pored over the pages of old Gines Perez de Hita’s apocryphal but chivalresque history of the civil wars of Granada, and the feuds of its gallant cavaliers, Zegries and Abencerrages, that city has ever been a subject of my waking dreams; and often have I trod in fancy the romantic halls of the Alhambra.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Gerhart Hoffmeister, “Exoticism: Granada’s Alhambra in European Romanticism,” in *European Romanticism: Literary Cross-Currents, Modes and Models*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 113-124.

⁵⁶ Washington Irving, *Tales of the Alhambra* (León: Everest, 2005), 49.

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Diego Saglia argues that the climax of Victorian fascination with Islamic antiquities of Spain is marked by Owen Jones's comprehensive *Plans, Elevation, Sections and Details of the Alhambra* (1836-42, 1845) and his later *Grammar of Ornament* (1850). Granada was consecrated by Jones as central icon in the British imaginary when in 1854 he designed the Alhambra Court for London's Crystal Palace replicating the Court of Lions, Hall of Kings and Hall of Abencerrajes.⁵⁷

During these times mystical interpretations of the Alhambra also reached esoteric heights. Authors such as A. W. Schlegel and François-René de Chateaubriand incorporated the idea of conversion and personal dedication into their stories. Both writers allegorised the Alhambra as a dream palace of worldly temptations and man's fall from grace, by comparing it to a woman's lure, while also contrasting it with the higher Kingdom of God.⁵⁸ Ironically, however, according to Hoffmeister, it is during these times that the living tradition of romantic Alhambraism was brought to an end. Hoffmeister claims that the symbol of Boabdil's last sigh, as a symbol of innocence lost, was in later literature used either ironically, such as in the works of Heinrich Heine, where the lovers commit suicide, or politically, as in Adam Mickiewicz's inversion of the historical situation in order to incite the Poles to political activism.⁵⁹

Henceforth, after 1820, the narratives about Granada and the Alhambra featured concerns with domesticity and the public sphere. The cultural

⁵⁷ Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain*, 262.

⁵⁸ Hoffmeister, "Exoticism: Granada's Alhambra in European Romanticism," 123, 124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

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geography of Granada represented a network of boundaries, political, religious, historical and linguistic, as well as the interweaving of cultures through cross-cultural encounters and inter-marriages. Saglia argues that these narratives complemented the romantic desire for a return to a better past by focussing on immediate geo-cultural and political concerns centred on birthright, legacy and belonging. The Alhambra became a contact-zone in which contending cultures could circulate freely. As a geographic and fictional place it opened up a space in which different cultural tensions could meet and clash.⁶⁰ On the one hand, the Alhambra emblematised political power and on the other, it was a civilised haven of peace and repose. Saglia claims that in the literature concerning the Alhambra this oscillation becomes a determining element. The palace, as liminal space, opens itself up as a locus of confrontations. In its dual role of palace and fortress, the Alhambra foregrounds the contrast between public and private, duty and love, while the whole architectural ensemble functions as a transitive space between East and West. The Alhambra, in itself, is well suited to convey a discourse of opposites as it is often defined as a dual place by historians and travellers.⁶¹

In *A View from Spain*, Alexander de Laborde establishes a clear separation between the exterior and the interior of the Alhambra in order to illustrate its essence as being a meeting point between two opposite spheres. There is a clear distinction between the fortress and the palace, thus between the

⁶⁰ Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain*, 263-266. See also *A Comparative History of Literatures in the Iberian Peninsula*. Volume I, eds. Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, Anxo Abuín González and César Domínguez (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2010), especially the chapter "Travel Writing" by Luis Fernández Cifuentes, 183-210.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 291, 321-323.

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defensive and public architecture of the outside and the sheltering and intimate structure of the royal palace, emphasizing the difference between outside and inside. In essence, the Alhambra as complex signifies both the seat of power and the safety of home for those living inside its quarters.⁶²

Aḥmad Shawqī's *Sīniyyah* poem, "The Journey to al-Andalus," brings to the fore the role that the Alhambra, as spatial construct, plays in the imaginaries of Muslim nostalgics. Muslim nostalgia centred on a yearning for the glorious culture of the past, exemplified by monuments and palaces such as the Alhambra, and the knowledge that it can never be reproduced.⁶³ In his poem, Shawqī's yearning for a lost past, the splendour of a bygone Andalusia, is evoked through the description of Andalusian architectural objects. Akiko M. Sumi claims that Shawqī's work is a description or imitation of the external realities of the architecture; it is in essence a verbal representation of architecture. However, although Shawqī realistically describe the Alhambra and its glorious past, he also touches on its liminality in the sense that he shows its present state in contrast to the past, its —state from existence in the past to absence in the present."⁶⁴ Shawqī's poem is more concerned with absence as it focuses on the disappearance of a glorious past. Although the poet describes these past glories, he does not become part of this imaginative past world, but instead sees it from the perspective of a twentieth-century visitor to the Alhambra. By displaying existing inner parts of

⁶² Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain*, 321.

⁶³ See Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Manuela Marín, eds., *The Legacy of Muslim Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), highlighting the literature and language of Andalusia and also making reference to the pervasive sense of nostalgia found in writings of that era.

⁶⁴ Akiko M. Sumi, "Poetry and Architecture: A Double Imitation in the *Sīniyyah* of Aḥmad Shawqī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 98.

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the Alhambra, the poem establishes a realistic effect while perusing historical meanings.

Sumi points out that Shawqi's poem highlights the eternity of nature in contrast to the transience nature of the Alhambra. The poem reminds the reader of the tragic effects of the Christian conquests, but in reality the Alhambra of the present no longer sees these tragedies, but remains as —splendently beautiful . . . for the tourists, who come to see the history of the Alhambra with submission and admiration. . . . The palace building performs a hermeneutical function in interpreting its history. The speaker's touristic eye also gives the reader a feel for the movement of the inner space of the Alhambra, which suggests a spatial effect of architecture."⁶⁵ Shawqi offers us a vivid description of the Court of Lions:

91. You see the court of lions
in the open air,
Devoid of gazelles
and oryx.
93. [Made of] marble on which
the lions
Whose claws are dull and who are
soft to touch.
94. They scatter water
in the basin
Like pearls that leap up
to their smooth chests.
95. At the end of the era
in the peninsula,
[Al-Andalus] remained
after the crushing and grinding of time.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sumi, "Poetry and Architecture: A Double Imitation in the Sīniyyah of Aḥmad Shawqī," 111.

⁶⁶ Aḥmad Shawqī, "The Journey to Al-Andalus" quoted in —Poetry and Architecture: A Double Imitation in the Sīniyyah of Aḥmad Shawqī" by Akiko M. Sumi, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 86.

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In this poem the reader is subtly reminded of the contrast between the still-existing magnificence of the courtyard lions and the absence of the dominant Muslim power it initially symbolised. María Rosa Menocal states that the Alhambra, since Washington Irving, became the locus of a romantic Western vision of —Moorish Spain,” while simultaneously existing as a powerful and evocative emblem among Muslims and Arabs of a —precious moment of cultural dominion, subsequently lost.” She claims that the —story of the Alhambra, told in the fullness of its complexity, is a maze of superimposed memories that is a fitting emblem for the powerfully paradoxical and often unexpected cultural history of al-Andalus as a whole.” Menocal concludes that both the beginning and the end story of the Alhambra are —powerful attestations to the unusually strong and complex relationship among the religions of the children of Abraham.” Thus, the outward and inward visions of the Alhambra most often trigger a —version of that emotionally charged reaction, that blend of exhilaration and sadness in the student of al-Andalus.”⁶⁷

In the literature of the Alhambra, we notice the prominent role played by the physical architecture. These literary representations of architectural features most often involve a detailed description of the Alhambra's different features and characteristics. Quoting an eighteenth-century dictionary, Philippe Hamon writes that:

⁶⁷ María Rosa Menocal, “Visions of Al-Andalus” in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2-9.

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Description is a figure of thought by development which, instead of simply indicating an object, makes it somehow visible, by the lively and animated exposition of its most interesting properties and circumstances.⁶⁸

Hamon suggests that for literature the architectural object in its most universal sense has a rich and complex semantic status. Description of architecture, usually known as topography, generally exhibits three effects: hermeneutic, spatial and realistic. Firstly the garden can figure as a hermeneutical object in the sense that it always, more or less, involves an inside that is hidden and thus, necessarily, differentiated from the more apparent, exposed and visible outside. Furthermore, if a facade is involved it can never fully reveal the interior or make its function visible. The world appears as a juxtaposition of compartments, or boxes, of relative darkness and clarity. Accordingly, the topography becomes a strategy for obtaining information and gaining access to the truth.⁶⁹

Secondly, Hamon argues, there is the spatial effect; a literary text can capture the garden as if it were a differential and discriminating object that —analyzes space through interfaces and proximities or through partitions and contiguities.” Here the garden, or architectural object, either opens or obstructs. The garden distinguishes between what is —joined and what is disjunct, it welcomes, rejects or filters while partitioning, distributing,

⁶⁸ Philippe Hamon and Patricia Baudoin, “Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive,” *Yale French Studies* 61 (1981): 3. See Michel Beaujour, —Some Paradoxes of Description,” *Yale French Studies* 61, 27-59 for an interesting discussion on the elusive nature of description especially the paradox between motion and motionlessness. Gardens are static and made up of interlocking elements, while the working of a mechanism is motion as there is transference of energy, e.g. the wind blowing or the gardener working.

⁶⁹ Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth Century France*, trans. Katia Sainson-Frank and Richard Sieburth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 26, 27.

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straitening, classifying, and separating objects and subjects.” As such, it is effective in organizing strategies of desire or intentionality.⁷⁰

Finally, the garden, or any architectural object, is first and foremost real as it provides a recognisable frame or background to the literary text. As a result literature can conceive of such architecture as hierarchical objects or systems of constraint as they define interlocking components and configurations of main buildings and outbuildings, service spaces, levels and landings. This effect enables the establishing of relations between subject and object as it gives rise to the descriptions of dependence or influence that obtains between characters and their milieu, between the whole and its parts, and between the container and the contained.”⁷¹

Hamon makes it clear that these effects can coexist in the text of literary architecture, but most importantly it is to remember that literary architecture realises itself in the form of descriptions and this realization takes place through exposition. Exposition is always ambiguous. For Hamon, exposition is on the one hand always the —architectural and rhetorical locus for a given rationality” and on the other hand it —provides a site for eclecticism (both in the sense of bric-a-brac and organization).”⁷² Therefore, exposition is at the same time functional and picturesque, for it becomes simultaneously a place that exhibits knowledge and entertains.

⁷⁰ Hamon, *Expositions*, 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 12, 28, 29. See also Hamon’s discussion on the four rhetorical figures found in this literature, metaphor and irony, metonymy and synecdoche. I can also point out Hamon’s interesting discussion on the four dominant conceptions of realism existing in the nineteenth century: hermeneutical or “vertical” realism, —horizontal” realism and thirdly a realism that depicts the real as an intersection of norms.

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While the term *exposition* elicits many different nuances, I am going to adopt it in terms of its exposing character, which is to make visible and to make known. Previously I have argued that presence is firstly that which is visible, therefore something physically present. However, by being physically present, presence is also exposed and can thus not only be experienced, but also be described. Furthermore, in these instances, of production, exposition and description of architectural presence effects, one cannot only rely on a discourse concerned with meaning and interpretation, but one should also be open to the play of words, or the “textual poetics,” through which presence is made palpable.

Although all three of Hamon’s effects can be traced in the literature of the Alhambra, I believe that the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra do not passively become part of these narratives, but that these gardens are able to trigger their own narrative of a sensuous architectonics. In the vocabulary of sensory perception, the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra become an exposition of the ambivalent character of the *barzakh*. The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra show themselves in literature and in this process they write their own *„Ajā‘ib*.

SALLY SHIVNAN, “GRINGA MORISCA”

Sally Shivnan’s travel narrative “*Gringa Morisca*” is clearly an example of what Hamon calls a “memory-storehouse.” As Hamon observes, the travel account, which is a great consumer of architectural descriptions, is nothing more than a “journey through the already anchored versions of public and

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personal history.” Buildings become perfect vehicles for activities involving the production of meaning or the —ure to write, paraphrase, gloss or read.”⁷³ Hamon explains that any description of a monument is always the description of an object situated in the real, thus an object bringing to its description its own underlying stories. However, in the description of the object it is also possible to rewrite and reactivate these —ffuse nebula of latent or absent discourses that surround the building such as anecdotes, myths, historical narratives, legends, etiological accounts of foundation,⁷⁴ or stories involving the origin of place names.”⁷⁴ Thus, any building’s atmosphere can be thought of as narrative, textual and literary for it either encompasses the many social discourses taking place within it or the yet unspoken sign systems captured within. Buildings, in this sense, only serve as a reason for the writer to —actualize a textuality and become the occasion for recalling or inventing a body of knowledge, anecdotes or memories.”⁷⁵

Hamon also argues that the travel account, which is a discourse about touring, is in fact really a tour through discourse. Not only does the travel writer include descriptions of buildings in her/his travelogue, but through her/his narrative s/he draws parallels between past and present times, triggers anecdotes and historical events and mediates on the differences and similarities of civilizations and their demise. Hamon concludes by stating that

⁷³ Hamon, *Expositions*, 47. Even though, Hamon’s discussion is concentrated on the romantic nineteenth-century traveller writer, these observations can also be traced in later travel writing. See Michael Kowalski, ed., *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992) and Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2011) for a detailed discussion on the subject of travel writing.

⁷⁴ Hamon, *Expositions*, 46.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

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in the encounter of word and monument, travel through the real blends into the reading of a certain reality that which conceals and disguises itself or does not readily answer the questions it is asked." What buildings mean is really then a question of recognising that the real is meaning and that meaning is always hidden," and in this process the building becomes a multisemiotic system."⁷⁶

If we consider these arguments of Hamon, our discussion of "*Gringa Morisca*" should concentrate on interpretation. Our questions should be questions of meaning and symbolism, what the author meant when she made certain comments, what were her feelings and what does it tell the readers of her narrative. Already in the title we are confronted with issues of social differences, gender and religion. When turning to a dictionary, we will find that *gringa* means any white, English-speaking female and that *Morisca* refers to Muslims who have converted to Christianity in order to stay in their native countries of Spain or Portugal. In the title, therefore, Sally Shivnan points the reader to the underlying level of double meanings associated with the historical narrative of the Alhambra.⁷⁷ She signifies her presence by evoking difference, thus by establishing the presence of an absent other." Although Shivnan is referring to her obvious "otherness" in relation to the Alhambra, through an interplay of meaning, she also brings to mind the "otherness" of the Christian convert, thus positioning the Alhambra in time and space. However, I would argue that Sally Shivnan's difference is not the rigid establishment of binaries, but rather that there is an underlying presence

⁷⁶ Hamon, *Expositions*, 47. 54-56.

⁷⁷ Menocal, "Visions of Al-Andalus" in *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, 2-9.

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of transformation. The Alhambra —speaks to her of eternity and mortality”; the building, itself, is the boundary between absence and presence and therefore speaks to her, ultimately, of belonging.⁷⁸

Considering the travel narrative only in terms of meaning makes it clear that architecture seems to have more to do with saying what is not there and thus more to do with absence than with presence.⁷⁹ On the one hand we have the solidness of the architecture, presenting itself to us in terms of its very materiality, its stones, bricks and mortar, while on the other hand within its spaces there are traces of other deeper meanings and representations. Within the visible presence of the architecture, there is also an other, something present but invisible. We can call it the presence of an absence. When we turn our attention to the Alhambra only in search for these absent meanings, there is the clear danger that the Alhambra becomes merely a shadow, devoid of any —appearance.”⁸⁰

Although, Hamon gives us many insights in the use of architecture in the literary text, his arguments serve to emphasise the fact that when we concentrate on an attribution of meaning, the building or garden, sensually

⁷⁸ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*, 125.

⁷⁹ Hamon, *Expositions*, 48, 49. Hamon questions the meaning of the architectural object, paying attention to the link between architecture and language. Architecture similar to articulate language constitutes a discrete system which produces discontinuities and differences, but even though the architectural object —establishes communications between subsidiary spaces that it incorporates while being itself incorporated into a more encompassing space, and even though it is defined by its articulation or directions (sens), it is far from certain that the architectural object produces meaning (sens) directly, without the moderation of another system such as language.” Hamon concludes his argument with the observation that he is not certain that architecture has a syntax, furthermore he believes that architecture has perhaps more to do with discourse, which he argues is in a way three times removed from the real. Furthermore, architecture, similar to the written language that lives on longer than the spoken word, is barely affected by time.

⁸⁰ See also Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence*, 52-64.

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experienced or perceived, is mostly absent. However, I argue, there is always a double movement of presence and absence in the establishment of being. If we understand absence and presence only in terms of an abstract notion of —other,” or as a lack, or as something vague and unrepresentable, the end result can only be a rigid binary between a secret and concealed inner and overt and exposed outer. For this reason I agree with Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Martin Seel that appearance in aesthetic appreciation is always open to the conditions through which something is given to us and presented to our senses. Only out of this presencing can we move to discover a world of possibilities. In Heidegger’s terms, the building that is standing there —first gives to things their look” and then —to men their outlook on themselves.”⁸¹

As a result, even in the literary process there is a movement, a negotiation or play between writer and architecture, between writer and reader, and most importantly between reader and architecture. Writer, reader and garden are simultaneously engaged in the dynamics of a spatial play out of which a world, or in terms of utopia, an-other world, emerges. Consequently, we will find, through reading —*Gringa Morisca*,” a presence exposed in a language that is —open toward the world of things.” As I will show through several examples taken from the narrative, this literary exposition shows us a presence open to the world of the *barzakh*.⁸²

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 42. See also his discussion on what it means to set up a world and what he means by this world, 43-44.

⁸² Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, —Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past), *History and Theory* 45.3 (2006): 322.

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Sally Shivnan wrote *–Gringa Morisca*” after visiting the Alhambra palace for the second time, her first visit being at the age of fifteen. Already in the epigraph the link between architecture and language is made by referring to a building that speaks.⁸³ The language it speaks is a symbolic language dealing with questions such as eternity and mortality, growing up and finding lost innocence. In essence, Sally Shivnan’s experience in this “other-place” triggers a personal journey, accompanied and enhanced by the architectural effects of wonder, magic, other-worldliness and even fleetingness, inspired by her perception of the palace. The movement of her life from a fifteen year old to adulthood and even beyond early adulthood is mirrored in the Alhambra’s own survival of its origin history, both growing and changing as times passed, but in away also staying the same.

When I was fifteen I could still surrender myself, in the way of a child, to pure magic.⁸⁴

The essence of childhood discovery: encountering wonders without preconceptions, without preparation, without a lot of ideas of self getting in the way. Like an infant seeing colors and shapes before there are words or even ideas for them.

I was the same and different person, back again, in the Alhambra.⁸⁵

Like them, I was witnessing the end of something, and the feeling of waking, really waking, from childhood was a revelation to me, nothing I would ever want to give up, but it came, I knew even then, at a cost.⁸⁶

I was there in search of the fifteen-year-old I had once been, but I didn’t find her, not exactly: what I found was my memory of her. It’s a fine

⁸³ Refer back to note 64.

⁸⁴ Shivnan, *–Gringa Morisca*,” 125.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 128, 129.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 134, 135.

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distinction, and indeed the distance between us was, at times, so slight, so slippery, that as I passed a certain reflecting pool, I thought for an instant, I saw her mirrored there.

She is as ethereal as the tint of almond in the Patio of the Lions. And maybe my present self is, too, so that I may need to go back one more time, in another twenty-five years, see how the place feels, how I feel, inside a new skin unimaginable to me now. I will pass the happy hours, walking in the Alhambra, conjuring communion with the past.⁸⁷

On another level, *–Gringa Morisca*” also asks hermeneutical questions, questioning whether pre-conceived knowledge or unmediated experience can lead one to the truth.

There are two ways you can visit a place. One way is to learn everything you can before you go, reading up on the culture, the history, the geography, the food and the people and the politics. Or you can go in cold, and if you do there is a lot of nuance you won't catch.

In my information-saturated world it would be a treat to have one object of attention that I approached this way. An unmediated experience. Immersion in a language, without an interpreter.⁸⁸

Taken from another point of view, *–Gringa Morisca*” can also be a comment on the distant, objectified tourist gaze identified by John Urry.⁸⁹ Travel in this instance emphasises the visual element of the travel experience without leaving any room for discourse and knowledge.

I am standing there contemplating the view while other visitors come and go—they stay a minute, walk up to the window, look out and move on, it's a small room, after all, and a lot like all the other rooms. I see how they stand around, how they lean on one leg, then the other. . . . I wait for the room to empty—it takes a few minutes, because these two are leaving but

⁸⁷ Shivnan, *–Gringa Morisca*,” 136, 137.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 127, 128.

⁸⁹ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1996), 2-4. Refer back to Chapter Four.

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now another is drifting in—he has that blank tourist-stare from too much looking.⁹⁰

In reading “*Gringa Morisca*,” the Alhambra is clearly a heterotopic and neutral space. It is a space that is set apart from the other spaces surrounding it, simultaneously real and unreal, and as such it holds for its occupants, as well as for Sally Shivnan and finally for the readers of her travel narrative, a multitude of meanings. The “otherness” of the architectural ensemble of the Alhambra carries over onto an experience unfamiliar to Shivnan. Observing that the Alhambra is “an alien aesthetic for an American girl,” Shivnan emphasises the Alhambra’s other worldly character. In tradition with the classical *Ajā’ib* Shivnan does not only give a description of the Alhambra’s features, but she describes an experience of amazement and wonder while floating around the palace “like a visitor from another planet.” Furthermore, it is an experience that affects her emotionally. Through this aesthetic encounter the sensual presence of the Alhambra brings her to “delighted tears.”⁹¹

The Alhambra, as neutral, in-between space, produces its own *genius loci* or spirit of place. Within the natural environment of its spaces there is a certain presence which stretches into the sphere of the imagination. Spirit and existence merge when a person opens herself/himself up to the forms

⁹⁰ Shivnan, “*Gringa Morisca*,” 130.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

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surrounding her/him and adding context to them by reaching back into her/his cultural memories.⁹²

You can imagine a sultana reclining on pillows on the floor: she is daydreaming and the walls are the soft background of her dreams and then for no clear reason she notes a certain pattern in the lines, arches enclosing a stylized trefoil of leaves, and her memories sharpen (a remembered look, a word, and what she said in answer), and then she bites a fig and breaks the spell.⁹³

If, however, we concentrate on the idea of presence, we also have to take note of the slight shift that can occur. Presence in the gardens of the Alhambra does not only imply the presence of the visitor, but presence can also emphatically imply the presence produced by the gardens and architectural spaces that surround the visitor. In previous chapters, I have shown the importance of vision and contemplation in understanding the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as spaces of the imagination. Out of those discussions, I have also isolated specific characteristics of the *barzakh* that came to the fore when analyzing Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts on the *barzakh*. Most importantly, for my extrapolation of these characteristics of the *barzakh*, was Ibn al-Arabi's belief that seeing the beautiful in the world was recognizing the signs of the Real surrounding us.⁹⁴ In this exchange of looking and interpretation, the courtyard gardens, in their aesthetic sensuousness, present themselves to us so that they can be noticed and

⁹² Malcolm Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory: Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 48, 49.

⁹³ Shivnan, "*Gringa Morisca*," 126, 127.

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Arabi, "*Towards Sainthood: States and Stations*," trans. William C. Chittick, in *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. 1, 182-183. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 80.

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accordingly be made part of the vocabulary of those that have experienced their —beauty.”

When travelling through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, whether physically or through literature emotion is aroused by the production of presence. Furthermore, this feeling, or atmosphere is ultimately a sign of the presence of the *barzakh*. Reading “*Gringa Morisca*,” one is drawn to the presence of existing ambiguities achieved through light, sound and movement. These gardens are not only part of the travel narrative, or “*Ajaib* of the traveller, but they also participate in the traveller’s journey by leading and enticing the traveller on a path of awareness, making their wonders and marvels known.

In the center of a marble-floored room, a low *fountain bubbles* in a small round pool. Its overflow is taken away in a narrow channel along the floor to mingle with other waters in an adjoining courtyard. The *fountain is the only movement* in the room. The *walls breathe deep silence*, which is strange to contemplate since *every inch of surface on those walls, and up to the ceiling, and overhead, is filled with a chaos of decoration.*⁹⁵

The eye wanders over this, into this, *led by curling lines to other curling lines, bumping suddenly into hard geometric shapes*, because the whole system, it turns out, is based on contrasts . . . that there is, everywhere, *both infinite variety and rhythmic repetition.*⁹⁶

It is so seductive to stare into it, and yet it is quite possible to look at it and simply feel soothed; *as busy it is, it makes gentle music.*⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Shivnan, “*Gringa Morisca*,” 126. In accordance with my arguments that the *barzakh* is that which stands between opposites and pulls them together, I have placed those features, that I believe show this paradoxical quality of the *barzakh*, in italics.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 126.

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The h' is silent in Alhambra; this *place holds silence within itself*. Luxurious quiet is its essence, in rooms like these, in the small courtyard nearby with its ethereal, slender alabaster columns and in the Court of Myrtles with its *long reflecting pool*. And down all the *shadowy walkways* with their arched windows looking over the city . . . and in the gardens, awash in the scents of orange blossom and jasmine and the *lullaby sounds of flowing water*.⁹⁸

A grand feeling for such a sheltering, intimate space—a paradox, like that other paradox, *the deep silence that contrasts with the intense visual music of every surface*. And it *is* music—the Arabic script waving through it like musical notation, the tiny leaves and loops and petals dancing, like grace notes, around the larger motifs.⁹⁹

Vision is an essential aspect of the experience of the gardens of the Alhambra as the gardens use miradors and screens to successfully guide the eye in what it really sees and what is subtly implied.¹⁰⁰ In “*Gringa Morisca*,” the courtyard gardens, especially the Patio of the Lions, achieve presence by tricking the eye with a play of colours, decoration, weight, depth and numbers.

The scale is intimate. The color of everything—more accurately, the color that results from the coming together of all the colors, paler and darker—is almond. The space is rectangular, with a central fountain featuring eight lions—small panthers really—in a circle facing outward. Around the courtyard's perimeter, a shady walkway behind slender alabaster columns invites the visitor to make a circuit. The columns are not much bigger in diameter than a wine bottle; some of them stand alone but others are grouped in twos or threes as if to accentuate their individual slightness. They have delicate floral-motif capitals, and above these the filigree-stucco takes over, flowing up into arches between the columns.

⁹⁸ Shivnan, “*Gringa Morisca*,” 127.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 129

¹⁰⁰ D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Gardens, Landscape and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*, (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 107, 108.

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The construction, in actuality, is simple post-and-lintel, and the arches just for looks, non-structural, a visual trick. These pseudo arches look impossible heavy in contrast to the narrow columns, but they don't, they have the lightness of lace, which is what they most resemble—dense, delicate threads netted with air. The illusion of lightness is an ingredient in the larger structural illusion, the illusion that there is no lintel above the post. . . . But I saw the magic just as well.¹⁰¹

It becomes clear when reading *Gringa Morisca* that Sally Shivnan's experience is unconsciously guided by the placement of the window, or mirador in the room. Not only does the window draw her vision outwards to the surrounding scenery of the Alhambra, but it also draws her vision further to the olive groves that surround the city and up to the far-off mountains in the distance.

I am struck by the balance between the interior view, of wall and window, and the view outward. The idea is not simply about looking out, as it usually is with windows; I am held within the room, even as I am invited to see outward. There is a point on the floor that is perfect for this balanced view, and if I move too close to the window I lose the equilibrium, step back too far and the world outside recedes too much.¹⁰²

In a previous chapter, I cited Ibn al-Arabi and Tim Ingold in establishing the link between knowledge, path and wayfaring, which all involve a process of unveiling or finding. Although centuries apart, both these scholars emphasised the idea that it was through movement that we engage with the world and become witness of its —coming to be” or to its —presencing.” Furthermore, I find that when reading *Gringa Morisca* the reader becomes aware of this eternal movement of —coming to be” or —presencing” generated

¹⁰¹ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*,” 135, 136.

¹⁰² Ibid., 129, 130.

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by walking through the courtyard gardens, where the boundaries between past and present, real and unreal, mind and imagination become blurred.

There was one thing about that small courtyard that I did grasp when I was fifteen and still did at forty. I learned that it was made for walking, not for sitting. I had the fun of discovering, not once but twice, how to walk around the perimeter, slowly, and watch the columns beside me crossing in front of the columns across the way, making lovely, shifting geometries before my eyes. A pair of two would pass before a group of three, and then as I turned a corner, three groups might converge, cross, separate, the neat columns, of course, always moving at a quicker speed past my eyes than the ones on the other side. This walking, and watching were hypnotic, and it was easy for me, both times I did it, to imagine a contemplative Moor, taking his slow turns around and around. My imaginary Moor was experiencing exactly what I was—falling in love with the grace of those columns with their stillness even in motion.¹⁰³

If we return to our guide Ibn al-Arabi, we will notice that in his description of the *barzakh* as being the Breath that breathes existence into the non-existent, love through movement engenders the beauty of the cosmos.

The root of the Breath is the property of love. Love has a movement (*haraka*) within the lover, while the breath' is a movement of yearning (*shawq*) toward the object of love, and through that breathing enjoyment is experienced. (II 310.17)¹⁰⁴

–*Gringa Morisca*” maps a journey of discovery through the multi-layered and emotional landscape of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. In the narrative the courtyard gardens breathe existence into an experience of their presence which is engendered by an atmosphere filled with movement and beauty. We, the readers, are not only made aware of the courtyard gardens’

¹⁰³ Shivnan, –*Gringa Morisca*,” 136.

¹⁰⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 126.

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marvels and wonders, but through —breathing” in their presence we simultaneously experience the enjoyment of them as real.

MARIE MENKEN, ARABESQUE FOR KENNETH ANGER

I have considered Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* from two perspectives. Firstly, I have attended to the *barzakh* as a spatial entity sharing in the characteristics of a limit space making it a relational in-between space similar in quality as a heterotopia. Secondly, I have taken a specific place, the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, and explored how these gardens in their topographical and architectural layout exhibit certain qualities associated with the *barzakh*. Within these gardens the presence of the *barzakh* fills the gardens with atmosphere, enticing the visitor to become part of a sensual and aesthetic experience whereby mind and imagination both become essential aspects of being-in-the world.

In both these instances I have turned to the concept of travel in order to show how the *barzakh*, firstly, in terms of its spatiality becomes a path on which we can embark, making us wayfarers on a journey of discovery and secondly, how these journeys through the *barzakhian* spaces of the garden involve both a perceiving subject and atmospheric presence of the garden. Furthermore, I have proposed that out of this dynamic interplay between opposites a discourse develops, or a utopic, similar to that of the „*Ajā'ib*, where spatial practice involves a movement from exterior to interior and from interior to exterior. The *barzakh* opens up a space in which —ived experience”

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and “moments of intensity” come together in order for a person to transcend the rigid binaries established by certain concepts of knowledge production.¹⁰⁵

My second example of the production of presence by the *barzakhian* space of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra is the representation of these gardens in film. This example may seem contradictory to my previous arguments where I argued that the *barzakh*, similar to a journey, requires a bodily presence in order to experience, feel and know. If we, however, return to my analogy of the *barzakh* as *Ajā'ib*, it is possible, with a slight shift of emphasis, to argue that the experience of motion pictures is fashioned out of a language of curiosity and a discourse of exploration. The *Ajā'ib*, as previously explained, tells of the surprising, the astonishing, the wonderful, the fabulous, the curious, the amazing and the marvellous, the last being etymologically very close to the Latin *mirabilia*, defined as wonders and miracles. However, from *mirabilia* we also get *mirabile visu*, which literally means “wonderful to behold” and returning to Arabic, *„ajiba* or *„ajab*, to wonder or to be astonished.¹⁰⁶ The journey, now, involves more than just seeing and describing, but also the way of experiencing the emotions of wonder and amazement.

This link between travel, space, emotion and motion pictures is also touched upon by Giuliana Bruno when she argues that cinema itself has developed

¹⁰⁵ Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*, 100.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mirabile%20visu>, J. Milton Cowan, ed. *Arabic English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3rd ed. (New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1976), 591.

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as an apparatus of travel and was born in the arena of tourism.”¹⁰⁷ From the beginning, film architecture participated in this movement, which —spectacularly mapped modern space and produced the effect of simulated travel” and as such it became an —agent in the construction of modern visual space—a geographical tool for mapping and traversing sites.”¹⁰⁸

Motion pictures—the real of (e)motion—wed the voyage of the analytical imagination to the pursuit of sensual pleasures. The diverse geographic directions of early modernity merged in film’s haptic way of picturing and experiencing space. Film established a topographical sense.¹⁰⁹ It was geographic attraction turned *emotion*.

Through film, spectators became enthusiastic voyagers, or travellers thrilled and amazed by the wonders of far-away places. These virtual journeys transported spectators into new worlds. Similar to the experience of architecture, they engage a practice of space that is simultaneously mobile and immobile. Both architecture and film are in-between spaced as both are sites of travel and dwelling.

The dweller-voyager who moves through space drives the architectural itinerary of the city, the activity of travel, and film itself. All three practices involve a form of human motion through culturally conceived space—a form of *transito*. Not necessarily physical motion, *transito* is circulation that includes passages, traversals, transitions, transitory states, spatial erotics, (e)motion. . . . As a means of travel-dwelling, cinema designs the (im)mobility of cultural voyages, traversal and transitions. Its narrativized

¹⁰⁷ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 76.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

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space offers tracking shots to travelling cultures and vehicles for psychospacial journeys.¹¹⁰

Film has inherited the possibility of a spectatorial voyage from architecture. Like a person wandering through a building or garden, absorbing and connecting visual spaces, film takes one on a journey, moving one across imaginary paths while traversing multiple sites and times. As the Russian film critic Sergei Eisenstein wrote,

[When talking about cinema], the word *path* is not used by chance. Nowadays it is the imaginary path followed by the eye and the varying perceptions of an object that depend on how it appears to the eye. Nowadays it may also be the path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, far apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a single meaningful concept; and these diverse impressions pass in front of an immobile spectator.

In the past, however, the opposite was the case: the spectator moved between [a series of] carefully disposed phenomena that he absorbed sequentially with his visual sense.¹¹¹

Therefore, film evokes the haptic sense of architecture. Being on the garden path and being a film spectator both engage an embodied —*ey* in the tracing” and not the fixed gaze of a disembodied and static contemplator. The alliance of film and architecture along the perceptual path involves a peripatetics. Furthermore, it is this moving spectator or embodied person who is making the journey in space that ultimately transforms the spectator into a

¹¹⁰ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion* 71. See also note 61 on p. 429. See also Bruno’s discussion of Antonia’s Lant’s article on p. 250. Lant criticises the current use of the haptic in terms of cinema perception. Lant claims that the haptic used by scholars such as Noël Burch emphasizing the discovery of depth and space as well as the employment of lighting techniques furthers the mediums’ advancement to a pure optical form removed from its initial haptic experience. What Lant’s critique brings to the fore is that the —*haptic*” concerns both the mode of artistic production and the spectator’s involvement.

¹¹¹ Sergei M. Eisenstein, —*Montage and Architecture*,” *Assemblage* 10 (1998): 111-113.

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voyager. Film viewed through the lens of travel highlights film's close relationship to architecture because it brings to the fore the fact that film unfolds as a practice of viewing space similar to that of a body moving along an architectural itinerary, effectively turning the body into a travelling lens."¹¹²

Such a multiplicity of perspectives, a montage of 'travelling' shots with diverse viewpoints and rhythms, also guides the cinema and its way of site-seeing. Changes in the height, size, angle, and scale of the view . . . are embedded in the very language of filmic shots, editing and camera movements. Travel culture is written on the techniques of filmic observation.¹¹³

Bruno claims that the "genealogical architectonics" of film can be considered as an aesthetics of the touristic spatial practice. Similar to that of a journey, filmic space is consumed as a vast commodity as the view it offers entices the spectator to further explore its scenery. "Attracted to vistas, the spectator turns into a visitor. The film 'viewer' is a practitioner of viewing space—a tourist."¹¹⁴ Through film, the spectator embarks on a journey of discovery enticed by the spatial architectonics offered up for consumption.

Also commenting on the bond between architecture and film is the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa. Pallasmaa writes that cinema and architecture are not only closely related because of their temporal and spatial structures, but because both articulate lived space. Both art forms "create and mediate comprehensive images of life. . . . Both forms of art define dimensions and

¹¹² Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 56, 62, 63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

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essences of existential space—they both create experiential scenes for life situations.”¹¹⁵ Most importantly, according to Pallasmaa, film and architecture, as artistic works, originate in the body of the artist and they —return to the human body as they are being experienced.”¹¹⁶ These artworks inhabit the border area between self and the world, mediating between emotional and aesthetic factors and the body’s physical point of reference.

In the experience of art, a peculiar exchange takes place; I lend my emotions and associations to the space and the space lends me its aura, which entices and emancipates my perceptions and thoughts. An architectural work is not experienced as a series of isolated retinal pictures, but in its fully integrated material, embodied and spiritual essence. It offers pleasurable shapes and surfaces molded for the touch of the eye and other senses, but it also incorporates and integrates physical and mental structures, giving our existential experience a strengthened coherence and significance.¹¹⁷

Pallasmaa’s descriptions of the architectural experience touch ground with Gernot Böhme’s space of bodily presence, as referred to in the previous chapter. Böhme’s arguments paved the way for the understanding of the *barzakh* as a certain atmospheric presence, an “in-between-phenomenon” which has its own ontological status, for it is the third thing standing between an object and a subject. As Böhme explains, bodily space is the way that I am physically here and am also aware of that which is other than me and as such becomes the space of actions, moods and perceptions. As a space of action, my bodily presence, on the one hand, centres me and makes me

¹¹⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, “New Architectural Horizons,” *Architectural Design* 77 (2007): 21.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21

¹¹⁷ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 13.

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aware of physical directions such as above and below, right and left, but on the other, it concerns those movements which make things larger and smaller depending on the presence of light or darkness. Böhme observes that —bodily space as the space of actions is experienced essentially as possibility, as scope.”¹¹⁸

The second aspect of the space of bodily presence is, according to Böhme, the space of moods as a physical expanse that involves a person affectively. This, in essence, is also the space of the *barzakh* and as atmospheric space it is —a certain mental or emotive tone permeating a particular environment and it is also the atmosphere spreading spatially around me, in which I participate through my mood.”¹¹⁹

Lastly, perceptual space is the space that I am in, among things, but also —the way in which, through perceiving, I am outside myself; or it is expanse, insofar as my own presence is articulated through the presence of things.”¹²⁰ Most importantly, however, according to Böhme’s analysis, is the fact that although bodily space is always the space in which a person is present, it is also at the same time the extension or, in other words, the —expanse” of that person’s presence itself.

The space of moods is the space which, in a sense, attunes my mood, but at the same time it is the extendedness of my mood itself. The space

¹¹⁸ Gernot Böhme, “The Space of Bodily Presence and Space as a Medium of Representation,” *Transforming Spaces: The Topological Turn in Technology Studies*, ed. Mikael Hård, Andreas Lösch and Dirk Verdicchio, (2003), 5. <http://www.ifs.tu-darmstadt.de/fileadmin/gradkoll//Publikationen/space-folder/pdf/Boehme.pdf> (accessed September, 2011)

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

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of actions is the space in which I can act, but also the scope of my possibilities. The space of perceptions is the space in which I perceive something, but also the expansion of my involvement with things.¹²¹

When we consider Böhme's space of bodily presence as an expansion of presence itself, we embark on a journey that opens up specific spaces, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, to be experienced by being actively present, but also in absence through literature and film. Furthermore, on this journey of experience the specific element of the *Ajā'ib*, to perceive something out of the ordinary, comes into play. This transaction was recognised by the fifteenth-century Iranian Theologian Al-Jurjānī when he defined *ajab* as —~~to~~ change of the *nafs* [spirit or soul] through something the cause of which is unknown and goes out of the ordinary."¹²²

It is my argument that Marie Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* fully encapsulates this spirit of the *Ajā'ib* for it absorbs the viewer into a narrative of the extraordinary space of the *barzakh*. Similar to the architecture of the garden that captures the spectator physically and sensually with its presence, the film, through a —~~hapticity~~ "hapticity" of vision, brings something out of the ordinary into view and as such expands the spatial imagination with creative knowledge.¹²³ In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* presence is marked by the traces left, like a visual caress, of the atmospheric effect of the *barzakh*.

¹²¹ Böhme, "The Space of Bodily Presence and Space as a Medium of Representation," 5

¹²² al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-tārīfāt: A book of definitions*, ed. G Flugél (Leipzig, 1845), 152 quoted by Roy P. Mottohedeh, "Ajā'ib in the One Thousand and One Nights," in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 30.

¹²³ Hapticity is a word used by Finish architect and professor of Architecture Juhani Pallasmaa in order to emphasise the importance of the tactile sense in the experience of architecture.

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In previous chapters I have argued that an aesthetic experience of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra relies on all the senses being involved in the experience. Firstly, experience of the gardens is reliant on being physical present in the gardens and secondly the production of presence, through the architectonics of the gardens, pulls the visitor into an experience of their atmospheric presence effects. However, in order to argue that these gardens in the film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* also exude presence, which can be experienced, not only visually but also tacitly, I will briefly refer to Pallasmaa's account of the link between vision and hapticity in the experience of architecture, before touching on the —describing camera” and its role in this experience.¹²⁴ Finally, I will analyse *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* to show how the essence of the *barzakh* is captured in the forms, figures and rhythms of movement and light, which simultaneously show and not-show both the real and the unreal.

Pallasmaa claims that any architectural experience is dependent upon the tactile sense for making that experience complete and satisfying. He explains that hapticity is a sensory approach that integrates a person's perceptions of the world with the self. Not only are visual perceptions integrated and fused into the —haptic continuum of the self,” but bodies remember where they are located. —My body becomes truly the navel of my world, not in the sense of

¹²⁴ See also Giuliana Bruno's short summary of haptic theories and film in *Atlas of Emotion*, 250. See also Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, eds., *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in the 1930's European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 21. See also Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) for a very detailed account of the involvement of the lived body in cinematic perception and expression. I have coined the term —describing camera” after Seymour Chatman's discussion of the role the camera plays in narrative description in his article —What is description in the Cinema?” *Cinema Journal* 23.4 (1984): 4-11.

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the viewing point of a central perspective, but as the very site of reference, memory, imagination and integration.”¹²⁵ Pallasmaa argues that all the senses, even vision, are extensions of the tactile sense, as the —sense organs are specialisations of skin tissue, and as all sensory experiences are modes of touching, both literally and metaphorically, and thus related to tactility. Our contact with the world takes place on the boundary line of the experiential self through specialised parts of our enveloping membrane.”¹²⁶ Every encounter that takes place between a person and the world involves a complete human being participating fully in the encounter of being-in-the-world.

Pallasmaa is not the only theorist to link visual experience with tactility. Already in 1934 John Dewey commented on the importance of all the senses in aesthetic experience, especially the interplay of vision and touch, as the following quote shows.

When we perceive, by means of the eyes as causal aids, the liquidity of water, the coldness of ice, the solidity of rocks, the bareness of trees in winter, it is certain that other qualities than those of the eyes are conspicuous and controlling perception. And it is as certain as anything can be that optical qualities do not stand out by themselves with tactual and emotive qualities clinging to their skirts.¹²⁷

The most important theorist of the link between vision and touch is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for he points out that perception is not only visual, tactile or audible, but that a person perceives in a total way with her/his whole being. —

¹²⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, —“Opticity Vision,” *Architectural Design* 75 (2005):137. See also Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 12.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹²⁷ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1934), 128.

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grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.”¹²⁸ Commenting on perception and film, Merleau-Ponty states that if we consider film as a perceptual object then film becomes not a sum total of images but a —temporal *gestalt*.”¹²⁹ Through film we encounter a new reality brought to us by the succession of scenes and the manipulation of sound and light. The camera takes on the role of narrator and describes visually a scene that spectators experience with all their senses. Although vision places us in the present tense, haptic experience suggests the experience of a —temporal continuum.” Film as montage or collage strengthens the experience of tactility and time.¹³⁰

The reality of sensuous architecture or of sensuous vision in film is built upon the experience of light, shadow, depth and unfocussed vision. Pallasmaa points out that light is emotionally absent until it becomes concretised by matter which illuminates it and makes it present. In order to show the importance of light, Pallasmaa cites James Carpenter, an artist concerned with the experiential qualities of light. According to Carpenter there is a tactility to light itself, thus to something immaterial. —With light you are dealing with a purely electromagnetic wavelength coming in through the retina, yet it is tactile . . . Your eye tends to interpret the light and bring to it some sort of

¹²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. H. Dreyfus and P. Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 50. See also Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 56 for her discussion of film in terms of journeys made through time. Spectatorship becomes an embodied and kinetic event linked in terms of movement to the idea of street walking, allowing for different levels of spatial experience and emotional involvement.

¹²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 54.

¹³⁰ Juhani Pallasmaa, —Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture,” <http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/miller/jpHapticity.PDF> (accessed March 11, 2013)

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substance which, in reality, is not there.”¹³¹ Through an emotionally charged experience light takes on a specific atmospheric quality. Moving into the light the pupils of the eyes physically adjust to the brightness of the light, while emotionally the light engenders feelings of warmth and intensity. Thus, as the experience of light turns light into a “—substance” that can be felt on the skin, it can be argued that light is simultaneously both real and unreal and as such a perfect quality of the *barzakh*.

Another artist concerned with light is James Turrell, who in two interviews concerning his work says that there is a “—thing-ness” about light and that although there is nothing to touch or smell, light touches you in a potentially transformative experience. Turrell explains that his work involves making spaces that apprehend light for perception. In the perception of a feeling, the light is physically present; it inhabits space and has substance. This feeling is the result of the fact that the eyes are touching and that the eyes are feeling. Ultimately, light is absorbed through the skin and empowers and changes a person.¹³²

As I have pointed out before, in Ibn al-Arabi’s teachings light is imagination and as such it “—penetrates into sheer nonexistence and gives it the form of existence.” Light as imagination is ultimately the presence of the *barzakh*.

The *barzakh* is the widest of the presences and the Meeting Place of the Two Seas. (Koran 18:60) —the Sea of Meanings and the Sea of Sensory

¹³¹ James Carpenter, et.al., *James Carpenter* (interview), *Architectural Edition* (Virginia: Blacksburg, 2005), 5, quoted in Pallasmaa, “—Opticity Vision,” 138.

¹³² Sue Steward, “James Turrell Trips the Light Fantastic,” *London Evening Standard*, October 14, 2012, Arts Section. <http://www.standard.co.uk/arts/james-turrell-trips-the-light-fantastic-6524522.html>. —Interview with James Turrell,” EGG: The Arts Show http://www.pbs.org/wnet/egg/215/turrell/interview_content_1.html (accessed March, 2013).

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things. The sensory thing cannot be a meaning, nor can the meaning be a sensory thing. But the Presence of the Imagination—which we have called the Meeting Place of the Two Seas—embodies meanings and subtilizes the sensory thing. It transforms the entity of every object of knowledge in the viewer's eye. . . . It gives form to that which has no form. It turns the impossible into the possible.¹³³ (III 361. 5; II 183)

In her wonderful and insightful book, *Moving Pictures*, Anne Hollander writes that movies get straight at the viewer, film moves us with a kind of pictorial demand, whereby its direct appeal goes straight through light and shadow into our eyes to our feelings.¹³⁴ Hollander explains that the action of light is a primal drama which compels human imagination. The dramatic relationship between vision and light not only resulted in metaphors for achieving redemption, acquiring knowledge, understanding and ultimately transcendence, it is also something experienced and felt. The fact that light is never still enables the moving camera, by its very nature, to engage a person's feelings about their relationship to movement, as in the movement of earth and sun, and thus to develop an art form out of the constant action of light. Furthermore, even without showing any movement, there is the perception of light moving and in essence through the action of light the spectator embarks on a journey of discovery. However, this discovery does not happen instantaneously, but rather as the light changes and shows what —~~to~~ is and is not a present moment" discovery becomes a moving present.¹³⁵

¹³³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 122-124.

¹³⁴ Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 18.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

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Similar to Bruno's analogy linking sight-seeing and site-seeing in cinema and travel, Hollander argues that film offers us a sequence of movie frames laden with constant shifts. By means of these shifts the passage of light changes the relationship between light, shadow and colour. Everything that we see directly is also seen in motion since light itself moves. Therefore, nature never stays the same and it also never stays looking the same. This is the aspect of light that engages our feelings about our relationship to time, vision and physical objects and gives to it a sense of transience.

And so the dialectic of light and dark ensures the emotional potency of any movie . . . just by representing the mutable chiaroscuro that makes us see and know the mutable world. . . . Movies redouble the effect of light's motion by actually moving—The picture never stands still, just as light never does—and just as the eye never does. The moving eye is the other half of moving light, the analogue of the individual desiring heart and searching mind, the fixed gaze is the property of death; the living eye is in motion. . . . The moving eye is open and it signifies openness to experience—the constant susceptibility of the individual's inner life, which in a sacred context used to be called the soul.¹³⁶

In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, Marie Menken uses the camera as her narrator to present the spectator with a quality that moves her/him directly.¹³⁷

It is my view, however, that although Menken manipulated the camera in its function as narrator, it is in the all-encompassing experience of watching the film that the presence of the *barzakh*, characterised by the courtyard gardens

¹³⁶ Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, 20. See also Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 14 for his description of unfocussed vision in the experience of an enveloping spatiality. According to Pallasmaa, peripheral vision enfolds the subject and strengthens the experience of interiority. Through peripheral perception and anticipated vision a person becomes spatially and bodily involved with her/his surroundings, which brings about powerful emotional commitment.

¹³⁷ See Seymour Chatman, —“What is description in the Cinema?” for a more detailed discussion of the moving camera and a still camera and the role of the camera in description.

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of the Alhambra, shows itself in the figures, forms and rhythms that reveal motion in stillness and light in shadows. This permeating presence of the *barzakh*, as a poetics of the imagination, shows itself through the contradictory aspects of presence and absence and visibility and invisibility. It is through this production of presence that a person becomes susceptible to the world of the extra-ordinary.

According to P. Adams Sitney, Menken's aesthetics implies a centrality of the body with a strong emphasis on binocular vision. Through the somatic presence of her hand-held camera, the film becomes a sensual experience of a body going forth in motion. Furthermore, Menken was able to accommodate both worlds, that of the aesthetic enjoyment of "chance discoveries" and that of meticulous craftsmanship, thus dissolving the borderline between "intentional imposition of order and the discovery of unexpected orders."¹³⁸

Melissa Ragona comments on Menken's keen awareness of the relationship between moving images and static images. Menken presents the spectator not only with static images or pictures, but rather with filmic events. Ragona claims that in these events the pursuit of knowledge is founded upon visual

¹³⁸ P. Adams Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down: Visionary Filmmakers and the Heritage of Emerson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21-23, 30. See also Melissa Ragona "Swing and Sway: Marie Menken's Filmic Events" in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 20-44. Ragona argues that Menken was interested in the materiality of cinematic language by focussing on cinematic writing with light, making perception, movement and illusion the object of the artwork, thereby removing any representational framework from the film. Ragona writes that "Menken's animations played skilfully with both the objecthood of film . . . as well as film's performativity—its ability to animate the inanimate." See also Angela G. Joosse, "Made From Movement: Michael Snow's *That/Cela/Dat*, Marie Menken's *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, and Richard Serra's *Double Torqued Ellipse*" (PhD diss., Ryerson University, 2012). <http://digitalcommons.ryerson.ca/dissertations/789> (accessed August 2012, 27).

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communication that demands a keen optical mind and is dependent upon perception in the deepest sense of the word. Menken's films explore the relationship between sound and image, language and figure. In the shared performative valence between subjects and object (silence and sound, light and shadow), they create a lyrical production of space by means of a moving body. In essence, Menken presents her spectator with a raw and immediate experience.¹³⁹

By offering the spectator a raw and immediate experience, a film such as *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* becomes dramatic. Hollander states that when film suggests more than what it states it makes a strong demand on the viewer. Ordinarily, —human seeing” means only seeing something and never everything, but in film there is always the expectation of seeing more.

This is the fundamental stuff of drama; and the cinematic kind of art demonstrates this, using chiaroscuro pictures to engage us in. In film art it puts the pictures into an actual moving sequence. Even if the movie camera sits on a motionless subject, the film is still moving and we are still waiting, expectant and responding, our eyes and spirit in motion . . . *endlessness* is at the core of the medium—no tableau can put a true stop to visual flow or to the flow of time and feeling.¹⁴⁰

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger records a walk through the Alhambra palaces and gardens. According to Sitney, in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* Menken exhibits at once the exhilaration she feels at being there and the details of the gardens and architecture that attracts her attention. I can only agree with Sitney, but add that it is specifically the atmospheric presence of the gardens

¹³⁹ Ragona —Swing and Sway,” 29, 31-42.

¹⁴⁰ Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, 21, 25, 26.

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that becomes a play in light and shadow through her —dynamic matrix of sweeping and whirling camera gestures.”¹⁴¹ Although the drama in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is driven by editing and montage, the gardens themselves become alive in the film medium and in that moment human emotion and feelings become engaged in the viewing.¹⁴²

Clearly, in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* Menken’s camera, as narrative camera, brings to the viewer a poetics —ordered in terms of lights, the constant agent of possibility.”¹⁴³ However, in the words of Merleau-Ponty:

I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is around me, not in front of me. Light is found once more to be action at a distance. . . . Vision resumes its fundamental power of manifestation, of showing forth more. And since we are told that a bit of ink suffices to make us see forests and storms, light must have its *imaginaire*. Light’s transcendence is not delegated to a reading mind which deciphers the impacts of the light-thing upon the brain and which could do this quite as well if it had never lived in a body. No more is it a question speaking of space and light, the question is to make space and light, which are *there*, speak to us.¹⁴⁴

I have argued that in “*Gringa Morisca*” the gardens proclaimed their presence by emphasizing the physical qualities of the *barzakh*, such as light and shadow, movement and stasis, drawing the visitor into a physical and sensual experience of these characteristics. Similarly, *Arabesque for*

¹⁴¹ Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down*, 33.

¹⁴² Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, 26. Hollander also points out that movies have become a popular narrative form, allying themselves with the persuasive arts of entertainment and propaganda. They have become show business whose aim is to please the public and to make a profit.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27, 28.

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, —*Fe and Mind*,” trans. Carleton Dallery in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 178

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Kenneth Anger draws the spectator into the garden by provoking a physical response that captivates the spectator's awareness and elicits the emotion of wonder. The provocation of presence through movement and haptic vision makes the invisible visible.

Agreeing with Hollander, it is possible to claim that if one was to look for narrative meaning in either "*Gringa Morisca*" or *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, it is to be found —by absorbing the sequence of pictures directly, not by reading them and understanding them."¹⁴⁵ Hollander explains:

The story is not explained to an audience, but revealed to a participant. The scene of expectation is uneasy: what is going to happen? Not in the plot, but simply before our eyes. It will not necessarily be terrible or wonderful, just something not yet seen. Such an atmosphere can invest a neutral or tranquil scene with meaning when there is as yet nothing obvious to mean—the sense that it is about to mean something.¹⁴⁶

The production of presence in both "*Gringa Morisca*" and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is found in the drama presented to us by the architectural and topographical characteristics of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra. Their ability to engage, amaze and baffle the visitor lies firmly in the paradoxical quality of their in-betweenness; in-between time and space, near and far, here and now, and most importantly, presence and absence. It is the drama of the *barzakh*.

¹⁴⁵ Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, 29.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

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Water:

One of the most important features of the *barzakh* is its ambivalent quality, a quality exhibited by the pools in the gardens of the Alhambra, which are simultaneously static and filled with movement. Similarly to “*Gringa Morisca*,” where the “long reflecting pool” contrasts with the “lullaby sounds of flowing water,” the images in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* illuminate this ambivalent quality in the shimmering pool of water that in its stillness reflects the rooftops and blue skies, as well as in the quiet pools which in close up are rippling, undulating surfaces of water. In both the travel narrative and the film, these images mark a movement that is hidden in stillness or tranquillity found in movement.¹⁴⁷

Rhythm and Texture:

In “*Gringa Morisca*” the “walls breathe deep silence,” but in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* the movement, simulating a body walking around the periphery of the courtyard, beats a rhythmic motion which seems to vibrate. An effect heightened by the textured and rhythmic sounds of the accompanying music. Through these rhythms, echoing and contrasting with each other, details play off against one another, bringing into view movements that would have remained hidden in stillness. Perception becomes an embodied sensitivity as the eye is led by rhythmic repetitions and undulating patterns to see the sound made by the music’s textures of guitar strings, castanets and flute. In “*Gringa Morisca*” the eye is led by both

¹⁴⁷ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*, 127.

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—infinite variety and rhythmic repetition” to feel soothed as if touched by —gentle music.”¹⁴⁸

The presence of the *barzakh* is a palpable presence initiated by the eye tracing the edges and patterns of the textured walls and arches. Merleau-Ponty wrote:

There are tactile phenomena, alleged tactile qualities, like roughness and smoothness, which disappear completely if the exploratory movement is eliminated. Movement and time are not only objective data. They bring about the pattering of tactile phenomena, just as light shows up the configuration of a visible surface. Smoothness is not a collection of similar pressures, but the way in which a surface utilizes the time occupied by our tactile exploration or modulates the movement of our hand.¹⁴⁹

—*Gringa Morisca*” tells us about the wandering eye, led by curling lines into hard geometric shapes. It is a montage of seeing, similar to a person walking along with a hand gliding over textured surfaces and drawing out different details in perception. This same effect is captured in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* as our moving eyes expose the tension between figures full of detail, while others become vague. The liminal, in-between character of the *barzakh* is exemplified by the movement between presence and absence in the —shifting geometries” presented to the eyes in an —illusion of lightness.”¹⁵⁰

In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* this embodied motion of moving-seeing enacts Pallasmaa’s concept of haptic vision. Haptic vision promotes intimacy, engaging the spectator in the experience of materiality and pulling her/him

¹⁴⁸ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*, 126

¹⁴⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, —*Eye and Mind*,” 367, 368.

¹⁵⁰ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*, 136.

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into the sensuous quality of the perceived object. The play of light and shadow entices the spectator into the garden's phenomenological presence. In these spaces, vision becomes an extension of touch as the eye moves over the sculpted relief patterns of the textured surfaces in the manner of a caress. Sally Shivnan describes arches as having the "lightness of lace . . . dense, delicate threads netted with air," highlighting the need to finger and touch their materiality, which in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* is provoked by the rippling, serpentine surfaces of the walls and pillars.¹⁵¹ In this projection of shadow and light the grooves, recesses and concaves initiate intense and probing perception.

Light and Colour:

As mentioned previously, literature on the Alhambra ranged from fictional narratives, travel narratives and poetry to a description of the Alhambra's architectural features, or the study of its underlying codes and symbolism. The Sufi scholar, Titus Burckhardt, who wrote extensively on cosmology, art, architecture and iconography, commented that nothing brings a person into immediate contact with the culture of a bygone era as specific works of art or architecture. These works represent focal points within culture and as such they express something essential. They offer insights which otherwise could be lost in a purely historical or social enquiry.¹⁵² Commenting on Islamic art, Burckhardt wrote that in Sufism there were three ways for an artist to show "unity of the real" and that was through geometry, which translated unity in

¹⁵¹ Shivnan, *Gringa Morisca*, 135.

¹⁵² Titus Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, trans. Alisa Jaffa and William Stoddard (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1972), 9.

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the spatial order, rhythm, which revealed the temporal order and light, which made visible that which was invisible. According to Burckhardt, nothingness only exists in its illusionary opposite to Being, so does darkness only become visible by its contrast with light, to the extent that light makes shadows appear. Although light is unity, it manifests itself in a —ariety of graduations,” yet by —its nature it always remains indivisible.”¹⁵³

However, when we read Burckhardt’s descriptions of the Alhambra we are struck by the sensual impact of his imagery. Characteristic to the traditional *„Ajā‘ib*, Burckhardt’s description of the Alhambra speaks of wonders and marvels achieved by colour and light, which can only be experienced by the complete sensual body-in-space. Burckhardt’s descriptions of the Alhambra can be considered as an apt narrative to *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* as the following quotes eloquently show.

Colors reveal the interior richness of light. Light when viewed directly is blinding; it is through the harmony of colors that we derive its true nature, which bears every visual phenomenon within itself. . . . The Court of Lions in particular sets the example of stone transformed into a vibration of light; the lambrequins of the arcades, the friezes in *muqarnas*, the delicacy of the columns which seems to define gravity, the scintillation of roofs in green tile-work, and even the water-jets of the fountain, all contribute to this impression.¹⁵⁴

The smooth weightless surfaces of the walls are pierced by doorways , windows and arcades and where their weight had to be emphasized, they dissolve into a fine honeycomb, into sparkling light, and the columns

¹⁵³ Titus Burckhardt, *Art of Islam: Language and Meaning* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2009), 80.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 84. Titus Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, 207.

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of the pillared halls are so slender that the entire structure rising up above them appears weightless.¹⁵⁵

[The *muqarnas* cells appear as] honeycomb whose honey consisted of light itself. The magical effect of these formations consist not least in the way in which they catch the light and filter it in an exceptionally rich and satisfactory graduation of shadows, making the simple stucco more precious than onyx and jade. . . . The walls appear to be quite translucent, as if made up entirely of light-filled cells.¹⁵⁶

Burckhardt describes the light as vibrating, the architecture as seemingly weightless and the *muqarnas* as cells filled with the richness of honey. In these descriptions Burckhardt speaks to all the senses and he fluently links seeing with tactility, taste and hearing. Words such as “harmony of colors,” “the saturation of roofs in green tile-work” and the preciousness of “onyx and jade” highlight the affinity between colours and emotion.

When watching *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* it becomes clear that the film is not merely a visual representation of these descriptions, but that the filmic scenes transform these descriptions of the Alhambra into a visual symphony of movement, colour, texture and light. *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, in a similar phenomenological interweaving between the senses presents its viewers with an experience filled with tactile rhythms and shimmering depths. The spectator perceives the light-filled cells as if they were overflowing with honey glowing like the colour of almonds, whereby vision extends into a multisensory experience blurring the boundaries between what is real and what is not. Colour, according to Merleau-Ponty, becomes one of the keys to

¹⁵⁵ Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, 205.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

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the visible; it creates through differences, texture, and materiality. In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* colour gives birth to a spectacle that belongs to the world of the *barzakh*.¹⁵⁷

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger transforms the Ajā'ib of Burckhardt into a haptic experience of –site-seeing.” The film enables its viewers to visualise something wonderful and surprising, connecting imagination and lived experience in an intimate attentiveness to the self. The highly visual medium of the cinematic experience only emphasises the production of presence by the garden spaces of the Alhambra by presenting its viewers with knowledge of the neutral, opening up a space where one can simultaneously see what is and what is not. In essence, the film sets in motion an experience that draws the viewer back into the irreducible presence of the *barzakh*.

Depth:

Merleau-Ponty stated that depth is —pre-eminently the dimension of the hidden. . . . Depth is the means the things have to remain distinct, to remain things, while not being what I look at at present. It is pre-eminently the dimension of the simultaneous. Without it there would not be a world or Being”¹⁵⁸ I find that depth, as a dimension of the hidden, is exactly the manner of visualisation we encounter in *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*. The *barzakh* becomes perceptible not in terms of a strict boundary between absence and presence, but rather as a gelatinous membrane linking absence

¹⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 180, 181.

¹⁵⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 219.

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and presence by playing with light and depth. The effect of this play is seen in the reflecting pools of water shimmering with light while simultaneously suggesting shadowy depths and the play of sunlight on the tiles and arabesques dissolving their sharp edges into soft shadows. Light coming in through the windows not only emphasises the translucent quality of the windows as membranes between outside and inside, but the same light also emphasises the mysterious depths of the shadows deeper within the structures.

Arabesques:

On the one hand, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* emphasises depth and invisibility, but on the other, the architectural spaces of the courtyard gardens generate a visual cacophony of colour and light, creating “wall tapestries” through movement and form that engages a multisensory awareness. Commenting on the *arabesque* in Islamic architecture Titus Burckhardt wrote that it is a science that does not seek to capture the eye through its rhythmic patterns and lead it into an imagined world. To the contrary, the *arabesque* liberates all the preoccupations of the mind since it is not only concerned with meaning. *Arabesque* is concerned with being itself in all its stillness and its inner rhythms. Again, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* enacts Burckhardt’s rendering of the Alhambra:

The arabesque of the Alhambra combine abstract palmettes with stylized flowers and geometric interweavings—tongues of flame, jasmine blossoms, and snowflakes, unending melody and divine mathematics—or spiritual intoxication and spiritual sobriety combined, to use the terminology of the Islamic mystics. Hieratic inscriptions are inserted or

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interwoven into all this, and sometimes gentle, intersecting arches emerge from their strokes like the diffused glow of candlelight.¹⁵⁹

From the title of the film the word *arabesque* suggests not only the interweaving camera movements of Menken, but also the cinematic depictions of the *arabesques* on the surfaces of the Alhambra. The *arabesques* described by Burckhardt is put in motion by the contrast of the camera hovering briefly on textured surfaces to immediately move away again in swooping, arching movements. Menken's camera acrobatics, makes the shimmering delicacy of the minutiae over which she pauses all the more poignant in their power to arrest a certain balletic energy; for they absorb the kinetics of her movement through the palace and refract it, almost muted in the reverberation of drops in an otherwise still sluice, or in the respiratory hovering of the camera over a pattern in the tiles. She sweeps so quickly over the high arabesque windows through which a bluish light pours that they seem to take wings.¹⁶⁰

By either following the same architectural shapes closely in some shots, such as tracing the material line of an archway, or by producing contrasting lines in other camera shots, the zigzagging over classical leaf and star *arabesques*, the spirit of the film is unity in movement. This unity is ultimately achieved by the mapping of movement onto the seemingly static architectural form. For Burckhardt the geometric patterns of the roses and stars that continually run into each other and develop out of each other are, ultimately, the purest simile for the manifestation of the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wudjūd*). These

¹⁵⁹ Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, 206.

¹⁶⁰ Sitney, *Eyes Upside Down*, 33.

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arabesques are —spiral webs . . . woven from one single band” and radiating from many identical centres.¹⁶¹ In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* this unending creation of reflections upon reflections is never more pronounced as when Menken sweeps her camera so rapidly over the patterns that they become blurred and dissolved into one undistinguishable image.

In *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* haptic vision is not a fixed gaze, but is formed in the in-betweenness of absence and presence, and as such it is able to pierce the membrane between inner and outer horizons. In the words of Merleau-Ponty:

When I do concentrate my eyes on it, I become anchored in it, but this coming to rest of the gaze is merely a modality of its movement: I continue inside one object the exploration which earlier hovered over them all, and in one movement I close up the landscape and open the object. . . . More precisely, the inner horizon of an object cannot become an object without the surrounding objects' becoming a horizon, and so vision is an act with two facets. To see is to enter a universe of beings which *display themselves*. . . . In other words to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it.¹⁶²

Arabesque for Kenneth Anger pulls the spectator into the architectonics of the courtyard gardens by means of its construction of a haptic perception in which the visual is drawn into an experience of touch and feel and taste. Through this filmic experience the aesthetics of the gardens are experienced by a body animated by all the senses.

¹⁶¹ Burckhardt, *Moorish Culture in Spain*, 206.

¹⁶² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 78, 79.

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CONCLUSION: GARDENS OF PRESENCE

The courtyard gardens of the Alhambra present themselves to us as a space of the *barzakh*. I agree with Pallasmaa that the art of gardening is an art form which is inherently engaged with time and change, but also with a subtle emotional atmosphere.¹⁶³ However, although the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra answer all these observations, as spaces of the *barzakh* they portray their presence in their ability to show the —~~one~~—.”

Referring again to Pallasmaa and his comments that the —~~strength~~— of architectural impact derives from its unavoidable presence as the perpetual unconscious pre-understanding of our existential condition.”¹⁶⁴ I believe that film, similarly to a layered and multi-sensory architectural environment, makes observers part of the ensemble as they move through the scenes, episodes and detailed elaborations, which are held together by the —~~constancy~~— of an emotional atmosphere.”¹⁶⁵ The courtyard gardens are heterotopias, in-between spaces loaded with shifting and multiple meanings, but in both, —~~Gringa Morisca~~—” and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, the gardens are set apart in terms of their fluidity of perceptual and aesthetic experience, which makes them not only a point of passage, but a space where one can offer oneself up to a play of movement and light.

—~~Gringa Morisca~~—” and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* visualise the presence of the *barzakh* in a dynamic encounter with contradictions. In this space the

¹⁶³ Pallasmaa, —~~apticity and Time~~—,” 329.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 329.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 325, 326.

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visitor is also a traveller absorbed in the dynamics of sighting. The space of the *barzakh* reveals itself in the spirit of the „*Ajā'ib*, for similarly to the „*Ajā'ib* the *barzakh* reveals both worlds: the tangible and the intangible, the real and the unreal. Furthermore, the production of presence by the spaces of the *barzakh* is a potent and generative sphere of knowledge production that places us in a different relation to the world of the —ordinary”; it shows us the marvellous, the wonderful and the extra-ordinary. In the process, although the gardens are part of social space, they become intensely personal, imaginative and emotional spaces.

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Chapter Six

Conclusion: The Barzakh, an Epiphanic Journey

Epiphany: from late Greek *epiphaneia* “manifestation, striking appearance,” from *epiphanes* “manifest, conspicuous,” from *epiphainein* “to manifest, display,” from *epi* “-en, to” + *phainein* “to show.”

phantazein “to make visible, display,” from stem of *phainein* “to bring to light, make appear; come to light, be seen, appear; explain, expound, inform against; appear to be so.”¹

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I am alone in my chamber—sleepless—spell-bound by the genius of the place—entranced by the beauty of the star-lit night. As I gaze from my window, a sudden radiance brightens the east. It is the moon rising behind the Alhambra. I can faintly discern the dusky and indistinct outline of a massive tower, standing amid the uncertain twilight, like a gigantic shadow. It changes with the rising moon, as a palace in the clouds . . . every moment more distinct—more palpable. . . . Majestic spirit of the night I recognise thee Thou hast nourished my soul with fervent thoughts and holy aspirations, and ardent longings after the beautiful and the true. Majestic spirit of the past, I recognise thee. . . . Thou hast taught me how to read in thee the present and the future—a revelation of man’s destiny on earth. Thou hast taught me to see in thee the principle that unfolds itself from century to century— the germ in whose bosom lie unfolded the bud, the leaf, the tree.²

≈

We, by contrast, have become more modest or, better, more sensuous. We are able to experience beauty in the ephemeral, the transient, in the light glinting on a pewter vessel or in the play of shadow on a whitewall. Because we ourselves are transient beings, we encounter beauty in the lighting-up of appearances which assure us of our existence. Beauty is that which mediates to us the joy of being here.³

¹ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=phantasm&allowed_in_frame=0

² Henry Wadsworth, *Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1835), 126-128.

³ Gernot Böhme, “On Beauty,” *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 21.39 (2010): 31. <http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/nja/article/view/3001> (September, 2011)

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For a dissertation on travelling through the garden spaces of the Alhambra, it is not surprising that this project started with a journey. A few years ago I visited the Alhambra. While walking through the garden courtyards I saw water and shadow, light and depth, and suddenly, as James Joyce's protagonist Stephen in *Stephen Hero* explains, I saw it —~~at~~ once and knew what it was, an epiphany. . . . The supreme quality of beauty."⁴

This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral *thing*, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.⁵

Returning to Cape Town, I realised that the Alhambra, to use Sally Shivnan's words, spoke to me. It spoke of history, of space, of emotion, of the sacred, of beauty and most importantly connected to all of this, it spoke of gardens. I decided, after an absence of nearly twenty-five years, to return to university in order to find explanations for what I had seen in the garden spaces of the Alhambra. This dissertation, then, is the result of one journey that became another journey, a journey of discovery, a *rihla*.

⁴ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1963), 211. For background reading on epiphany in literature see Morris Beja *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), Ashton Nichols *The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth Century Origins of Modern Literary Moment* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), Martin Bidney, *Patterns of Epiphany: From Wordsworth to Tolstoy, Pater, and Barrett Browning* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), Wim Tigges, ed. *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) and Sharon Kim, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel, 1850-1950: Constellations of the Soul* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

⁵ Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, 213.

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My main concern was to find an answer to the accustomed binaries we encounter when we approach places such as the Alhambra in our everyday lived-experience. I wanted to understand the Alhambra beyond constructs such as mimesis or representation, or only as a signifier of deeper meanings that needed to be brought to light. Rather, I wanted to understand the spaces of the Alhambra in terms of their ability to produce an event, a presence that touches you and is touched by you.

On this journey I have encountered many insights and theories, but it was in the work of a thirteenth-century Sufi mystic from Andalusia, Ibn al-Arabi, that I found the tools I needed to position the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra within an aesthetics that emphasises an all-embracing encounter for experiencing and apprehending being-in-the-world. With the term *barzakh*, Ibn al-Arabi gave us a way of stepping out of a dualistic framework by focussing on a relational encounter including both object and subject involved. The *barzakh* designates an intermediate reality which shares in the qualities of two sides, thus simultaneously dividing them but also defining them. In Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts, the *barzakh* is also the world of the imagination, making imagination, as the *barzakh*, the ruling property of the cosmos. It is this intermediate quality of the imagination that allows us to see and perceive the world as intelligible and sensory, absent and present, real and unreal. Most importantly, however, is that Ibn al-Arabi's usage of the term *barzakh* removes the term from merely indicating an isthmus or gap between two adjoining entities, but adds to the term a definite spatial quality.

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Ibn al-Arabi refers to the *barzakh* as a courtyard between two knowledges, or two homesteads.

Between each two homesteads of manifestation and hiddenness occurs a *barzakhī* self-disclosure. . . . Thereby the *barzakh* may preserve the *wujūd* of the two sides, and neither side may see the ruling property of the other side, while the *barzakh* has the ruling property in both sides. It lightens the dense and densifies the light. In each homestead it has a property through which it does not become manifest in any other homestead. . . . In keeping with the reality of these homesteads, the cosmos become manifest in this world in the form of manifestation, which is what sensation perceives, and in the form of curtaining, which is what sensation does not perceive, including the meanings. (III 108. 10)⁶

Used in terms of a discourse of space, the *barzakh* as the space situated between the —homesteads” is a heterotopic space. It is a space set apart from other spaces, but also simultaneously part of our lived experiences. These liminal spaces, such as our parks, gardens or monuments, although found at the limit of society, are qualified by the *barzakh* as in-between spaces, which are not banished to the periphery of lived-space and viewed only in terms of opposition and conflict. As the *barzakh*, these spaces are also not empty spaces or non-spaces. But because of their liminality they are transitive spaces filled with movement and action that people engage through their senses and emotions. In this respect the *barzakh* becomes the map that expresses the identity of the space we are journeying through. As map, the *barzakh* plots for us a neutral space that merges the imaginary and the real, whereby these qualities become —juxtaposable or superimposable parts of a

⁶ William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 334.

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single trajectory, two faces that ceaselessly interchange with one another, a mobile mirror.”⁷

As mobile mirror, the *barzakh* develops from merely being a category of space into an aesthetic experience of space that emphasises a direct, immediate and intuitive awareness. Ibn al-Arabi explains the *barzakh* is at the centre of the movement from nonexistence into existence. In Ibn al-Arabi's vocabulary the *barzakh* is also the Cloud that stands between the manifest and the non-manifest. The reality of the cosmos is nothing but a “vanishing accident,” which ruling property is evanescence, but standing between this nothingness and the Real is the Cloud through which everything gains its presence. Witnessing the forms of the possible things is possible because of the relationship of the Cloud to the Real, “for it is a relationship of the forms which the viewer sees in a mirror to the mirror.” (III 443.8)⁸ In this witnessing of presence, the cosmos can be experienced fully by a complete human being.

The ocean of the Cloud is a *barzakh* between the Real and creation. Within this ocean the possible thing becomes qualified by Knowing, Powerful, and all the divine names of which we are apprised, and the Real becomes qualified by wonder, receiving joyfully, laughter, rejoicing. . . . So He is Hearing, Seeing, Knowing, Powerful, and you are hearing, seeing, knowing and powerful. The state of hearing, sight, knowledge, and power belongs to both us and Him, but it has two different relationships, since He is He and we are we. (I 41.31, III 314.2)⁹

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michel A. Greco (London: Vesso, 1998), 63.

⁸ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 181, 183.

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The *barzakh*, as used by Ibn al-Arabi, is in essence an epiphany for it is the —topological locus for *tashbīh*.¹⁰ *Tashbīh* (presence) as the opposite of *tanzīh* (absence) is revealed in the —lifting of the coverings of the eyesight, which through piercing the veils of reality reveals an intensive moment of perceptual insight.¹¹ Ibn al-Arabi further suggests that insight is the result of the comingling of light and darkness, for the —form's darkness is a shadow, and its light is a radiance . . . upon the mirror of the proportioned body.¹² Furthermore, in this fusion of shadow and light there is an epiphanic disclosure of a —face that is beautiful” and —with every loveliness grants us cheerfulness and encounter.¹³ Thus, the *barzakh* is a mode of apprehending the world that emphasises an aesthetic experience of a reality that presents itself to us and is perceived by us though all the senses. In this regard, the *barzakh* has a dynamic nature, exhibiting the fact that —every locus has a beauty that is specific to it and belongs to nothing else” and that this —self disclosure drapes it in beauty upon beauty, so it remains forever a new beauty in each self-disclosure, just as in itself it remains forever in a new creation.¹⁴

On the one hand, the *barzakh* is a spatial concept that allows me to classify a space, such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, as a heterotopic third space. On the other hand, the *barzakh* is, to again borrow Hans Ulrich

¹⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 181.

¹¹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 107.

¹² *Ibid.*, 326.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 326.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 80, 81.

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Gumbrecht's phrase, an —epiphany of form.”¹⁵ Understood as such, the concept of the *barzakh* opens up possibilities for future reflection on the production of presence as an alternative mode of knowledge production. A space-related notion of the *barzakh* underscores the production of presence as the —convergence of an event-effect with an embodied form.”¹⁶ Through this convergence of form and event fixed and rigid meaning structures are replaced by an all-encompassing and being present-in-the-world experience. This quest to move beyond mimesis and representation prompted Jean-Luc Nancy to claim that presence itself is a birth. Furthermore, it is a birth that is at once the slipping away of presence, and that through which everything comes to be.

The coming is a coming and going.‘ It is a back and forth, which nowhere exceeds the world in the direction of a Principle or an End. For this back and forth contained within the limit of the world is the world itself, is its coming, is our coming to it, in it.¹⁷

The presence envisioned by Jean-Luc Nancy is a presence that is not “for” a subject, neither is it —for” itself, but is only achieved in the fullness of continual emergence or appearing of presence and a vanishing of presence. Only through this dynamic interplay will a person come to know the —delight of presence,” which for Jean-Luc Nancy is the —mystical formula par excellence.”¹⁸ By putting the spatiality of presence into movement, we come close to Ibn al-Arabi's statement that the whole cosmos gives birth instant by

¹⁵ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Epiphany of Form: On the Beauty of Team Sports,” *New Literary History* 30. 2 (1999): 351-372.

¹⁶ Gumbrecht, “Epiphany of Form,” 359.

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Birth To Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

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instant and that there is —nothing but the appearance of entities perpetually.” In this continuous coming-to-be, the *barzakh* as in-between presence collapses time and space into one fluid moment. In the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra this momentous —happening” of the *barzakh* is most visibly present in the contrast between open spaces and enclosed spaces, movement and stillness and light and darkness.

As a theory of a heterotopic third and neutral space, the *barzakh* is filled with endless possibilities that may provide an answer to Henry Lefebvre’s call for a new philosophy, the philosophy of presence.¹⁹ In the Afterword to Lefebvre’s *Production of Space*, David Harvey writes that the —moment” is a key concept in the thought of Lefebvre, which Lefebvre interpreted as fleeting but decisive sensations such as delight, pleasure, surprise and even disgust inherent in a person’s daily interaction with the world.

Such moments were ephemeral and would pass instantaneous into oblivion, but during their passage all manner of possibilities—often decisive and sometimes revolutionary—stood to be both uncovered and achieved. —Moments’ were conceived of as points of rupture, of radical recognition of possibilities and intense euphoria.²⁰

Viewed through the lenses of the *barzakh*, these moments of presence, or small epiphanies of emotional intensities, emphasise the dynamic character of being-in-the world. The *barzakh* foregrounds a mode of thinking about space that places primary value on immediate sense experience. In terms of a philosophy of presence, the *barzakh* as a hermeneutical tool broadens

¹⁹ Henry Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, eds. Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 166-176.

²⁰ David Harvey, Afterword to *The Production of Space* by Henry Lefebvre, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 429

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existing parameters by emphasizing a practice of space conditioned by movement and focussed on an aesthetics of appearing. In the kinetic and haptic movement of travelling through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, external and internal forces conflate to produce intensive moments of pleasure and insight. This power of the *barzakh* to provoke, to invite and to transform does not assign definite meanings, but as in the travel narrative of Sally Shivnan, *–Gringa Morisca,*” and the short film of Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger,* the *barzakh* serves as a means to make the invisible visible. In these examples the everyday courtyard gardens of the Alhambra open up unexpectedly and show themselves creatively. They change from ordinary garden spaces into extra-ordinary and dramatic encounters. By using the *barzakh* as a vehicle to explore these gardens, we are seeing them for the first time while immersing ourselves imaginatively in an aesthetic encounter that is at one and the same time tactile and emotional.

In this thesis I have argued that a person can be considered as a wayfarer on a path of discovery. As wayfarer, such a person is not only looking at the world but is, in fact, also opening herself/himself up to the world. It is in this process of opening up that I position the *barzakh* as an alternative lens to view the world. The courtyard as symbol of the *barzakh* not only symbolically indicates the borderline between light and darkness, enclosure and openness, but real courtyard gardens assimilate these characteristics in an epiphanic showing of spatial form. *–Gringa Morisca*” and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* reveal a world that recasts vision as a haptic experience of an

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aesthetic encounter. These two examples are the creative definition of the *barzakh* as an epiphany, an opening of a new world. Ibn al-Arabī calls this opening the opening of the unveiling whereby knowledge of the Real is obtained. He explains:

When opening take place, the eye of the first falls upon the Real and he sees Him in things, but the eye of the second falls upon the things, and then he sees the Real within them, because of the existence of the opening. (II 507, 30)²¹

Confirming the *barzakh* as the light of the imagination, by which the eye is able to penetrate into “~~she~~ nonexistence” and give it the form of “~~ex~~istence,” the *barzakh* becomes both the space and foundation of unveiling or opening. Ibn al-Arabī’s theory of the *barzakh*, from which he claims there is no escape, as the “~~it~~it accompanies everything in knowledge and delimitation accompanies the limit in consideration,” is an important consideration for discussions of philosophical, ethical, religious and aesthetic motifs. (IV 145. 27)²² However, the emphasis Ibn al-Arabī places on love can be further developed. Ibn al-Arabī teaches that no “~~ex~~istence-giver ever gives existence to anything until it loves giving it existence. Hence everything in *wujūd* is a beloved, so there are nothing but loved ones.” (IV 424. 21)²³ Thus, the fact that the limit not only defines and gives existence, but that it is also an act of love opens rich possibilities for further research and reflection.

An important aspect of the *barzakh* as the space of the in-between, which through the act of love brings the invisible into view, is already introduced by

²¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 225.

²² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 81.

²³ *Ibid*, 6.

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the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray in her book *To Be Two*.²⁴ According to Irigaray, vision understood as a moving caress, is the look of love. Normal vision is to look without seeing, but when looking with love all the senses are invoked in order to remove all separation between the visible and invisible. In Ibn al-Arabi's view knowledge of an object is only possible because of a connection to the object of knowledge, and this connection is love. (IV 108.9)²⁵ Irigaray claims that love's vision is a bridge between the visible and the invisible, or the spiritual and the carnal. Love, as bridge, becomes the third element standing between object and subject. Through the look of love it is possible to pierce the visible and see the invisible hidden from view. Thus, it is a gaze that creates, instead of ripping apart, and the world it creates is —ours, mine, and ours."²⁶ Irigaray's bridge acts as a limit, for in its double action of bringing together and drawing apart, the —bridge can never be the property of either. The bridge which I am for you, will never be mine or tome."²⁷ Through the act of love there is, simultaneously, embodiment and transcendence.²⁸ Irigaray replaces the term —love you" with —love to you," thereby indicating a third dimension between object and subject. Furthermore, adding the word *to*, an element of perpetual movement is attached to the love relationship. In Ibn al-Arabi's words:

His coming down is a drawing close,
and our approach is an ascent.
We drew apart and came together -

²⁴ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁵ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 46

²⁶ Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

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we are a splendid couple.
When we drew apart there arrived
new constellations in our heaven,
and because of my coming to be they left
clefts in our essences,
so there is a perpetual marriage act,
an entering and an emergence. (III 543. 19)²⁹

Thus, it is in Irigaray's understanding of the look of love as an act of vision which involves all the senses that we find the most important link to our own discussions of the *barzakh*. Irigaray's gaze, by which the visible is pierced to see the invisible, is more than merely abstract vision; it is a perceptual encounter, which is at once visual and tactile and belongs to the —between two.” It is love's gaze that nourishes and sustains both subject and object, as only the look of love can pierce the veils of existing differences. In Irigaray's words:

To respect you: to perceive you through the senses, leaving an extra cloud of invisibility. I perceive you, but what I perceive is not the whole of you, and the whole of me is not perception. I perceive what is already apparent. I perceive it with my eyes, my ears, my nose, my touch, my taste. . . . Perceiving you is a way of approaching us, an encounter in the distance, made possible thanks to our senses. What remains to be considered is what I perceive and what I offer to be perceived. What remains to be given is a perspective to perspective itself. What remains to be established is a relationship between the you who exists in space and the you which exists in my thoughts, in my heart. What remains to be given is a spiritual measure to my sensibility, as if I were looking at you with one eye and evaluating you with the other. When the gaze can be harmonized in one, I contemplate you and I contemplate in you the union of your corporal and spiritual natures. You, therefore, allow me to

²⁹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 234, 235.

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see the invisible. The invisible is here. You are invisible and visible. In you, the invisible appears but also remains collected, quiet, calm. It appears and exists. It is not necessary to enter the beyond in order to find pleasure in it: it is enough to contemplate you, to think of you. It is like the sky which gives itself and withdraws itself, near and distant, always other.³⁰

From this excerpt it becomes clear that Irigaray argues for an alternative mode of vision that is more than just sensational. Rather, it is a mode of vision focussed on a perceptual encounter that does not reduce the other to merely being an object of view. Perceiving the in-between is a way of seeing that protects the invisible in the perceiver, as well as in the one being perceived. It is a mode of vision explained by Ibn al-Arabi as follows:

Each is a witnessed and a witnesser, and each is ranked higher and lower. If one of the two says I, the other says I. If one of the two says Thou, the other says to it Thou. Neither becomes manifest to the other save through that through which both appear, and both sayings are correct. (III 361.16)³¹

Essentially, Ibn al-Arabi and Irigaray emphasise a perceptual and mutual experience facilitated by a neutral space that opens up two views witnessed as one. Thus, the *barzakh* as a discourse on space emphasises a relational encounter that allows an aesthetic awareness of the ~~other~~.³² This emphasis on bringing the invisible into view is also becoming the focus of a new interest in shifting aesthetics from an emphasis on distance, disinterest and judgement.

³⁰ Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 46, 47.

³¹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 232.

³² See Irigaray, *To Be Two*, 8, 9 for her use of the space of the limit to indicate that simultaneously hides and reveals the ~~other~~.”

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In *Literary Epiphany in the Novel, 1850-1950: Constellations of the Soul*, Sharon Kim writes that thinking of aesthetics in terms of epiphany is to recognise an alternative to the gaze that wants to colonise and destroy. Epiphany, according to Kim, reveals a state of not having seen, while intuitively inferring that there is still something that cannot be seen. In this recasting of vision an element of motion is introduced. There is a crossing over from one form of vision to another, which also indicates a limit or boundary. This boundary, at one and the same time, limits the subject in what it sees, while also making the subject an essential part of the act of seeing.³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposes that this limit between what is seen and what is not seen is the limit of consciousness. In fact, what consciousness does not see ultimately makes it see, but most importantly it is a vision tied to Being. The “flesh into which the object is born” is what makes a world visible.³⁴ Epiphany, considered in these terms, presents itself to the gaze indicating the presence of “another” not yet viewed.

However, it is in Kim’s discussion of James Joyce and Martin Heidegger’s contribution to establishing an epiphanic aesthetics that we can also locate elements of the *barzakh*, or in Ibn al-Arabi’s lexicology, the *barzakh* as “opening.”

³³ Sharon Kim, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel, 1850-1950: Constellations of the Soul* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 7-13. See also Sharon Kim, “Edith Wharton and Epiphany,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, 3 (2006): 150-175

³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968), 248.

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What brings all of this together is that whatever comes to you without self-exertion or raising up your gaze, or seeking, is opening, whether outward or inward. (II 505. 17)³⁵

We can trace the thoughts of Ibn al-Arabī in Kim's discussion of Joyce's understanding of epiphany as a moment of pure presence whereby the subject's identity becomes constituted by what is seen.³⁶ However, it is in Kim's discussion of Heidegger that we can position Ibn al-Arabī's *barzakh* as an opening that establishes the truth of Being by being witness to its —coming-into-being.” Kim claims that Heidegger offers us possibilities to understand epiphany in terms of an opening or in terms of the establishing of a new world. Heidegger moves away from the —self as —subject” and focuses on witnessing or glimpsing the —thing” itself. Kim argues that from these thoughts of Heidegger it is possible to establish a new method of vision and as such a new aesthetic poetics. Similarly, Ibn al-Arabī's opening occurs without any self-exertion; it is a moment of witnessing the appearance of something that is not only the source of wonder and amazement, but also an essential truth.

Thus, epiphany as —the mysterious opening” that brings the radiance of an epiphanic encounter into view is nothing more nor less than a *barzakh* or the —truth” of Martin Heidegger. Furthermore, it is —truth” established through light, for light is the source whereby the invisible becomes visible. Heidegger uses the term *lichtung* or clearing, which Kim describes as —a image both organic and primeval” whereby a person is placed in the —position of a wanderer or

³⁵ Chittick, *The Sufi Path Of Knowledge*, 224, 225.

³⁶ Kim, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel*, 33-39.

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traveller” and removed from a realm dominated by analytical thought. *Lichtung* is an expansion of space through mobility and perception, thus allowing for greater possibilities and encounters. The clearing, as a *barzakh*, is a space that is neither light nor dark, but rather a space that admits both. Allowing the play of light and darkness, the *barzakh* also admits silence and sound, presence and absence and the establishment of a complete fullness of being.³⁷ According to Kim, epiphany is also a mode of vision that involves the —mutual revelation of one who sees and one that is seen,” for only by revealing itself can something been seen, thus removing the subject-object opposition from the experience. Thus, epiphany reveals —what is,” as epiphany manifests the truth of being while unravelling the possibility of reification, manipulation and abuse.³⁸

It is also in this —modern poetics” that I want to position my understanding of the *barzakh* as an alternative lens for viewing the production of space in terms of an —opening” towards the appearance, or play, of the unexpected and the extra-ordinary. By focussing on a spatial practice that does not divide into binaries, spaces such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra become simultaneously spaces filled with meaning and spaces in the process of staging an event. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht states that the appeal of aesthetic appearance lies in the possibility of seeing truth or form within a dimension of awareness, in the process of its constitution. The —oneness” of the *barzakh*, as illustrated by the travel narrative —*Gringa Morisca*” and the short film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, is an aesthetic experience of epiphany, as it is

³⁷ Kim, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel*, 43-45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

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the opening up of —something substantial, not just the emergence of an idea.”³⁹ Both examples offer us an imaginative vision of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra as an opening of presence.

Defining spaces as a *barzakh* also expands established discourses on sacred space. In *American Sacred Space*, David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal propose two broad outlines of thinking about sacred space, the one substantial and the other situational. Referring to Rudolf Otto’s —*holy*,” Mircea Eliade’s —*real*” and Gerardus van der Leeuw’s —*power*,” they understand a substantial definition of the sacred to be —*an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation, full of ultimate significance.*”⁴⁰ Turning to Emile Durkheim, they propose that a situational definition will locate the sacred at the —*nexus* of human practices and social projects.”⁴¹ According to this definition, sacredness is the result of the sacralisation of space, time and persons and as a result it is frequently challenged.⁴²

Chidester and Linenthal’s division of sacred space into substantial and situational categories is also understood as the poetics of sacred space or the politics of sacred space. The poetics of sacred space recognises that sacred space can be located in those centres where there is a substantial

³⁹ Gumbrecht, “Epiphany of Form,” 365.

⁴⁰ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, ed., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6. See also the rest of their discussion on the production of sacred space: firstly in terms of ritual, especially the role of the body in ritual production; secondly in terms of significance and meaning and thirdly in terms of contested space, 9-20. See also Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*, expanded edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) for a discussion of sacred place as a “storied place,” thus becoming sacred because of the stories told about them.

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presence of an uncanny —~~er~~,” or in those spaces attuned to visions of the —~~er~~.” Referring to Gerardus van der Leeuw’s discussion of sacred space, Chidester and Linenthal, further qualify the poetics of sacred space as part of a romantic imagination, which places power at the centre of specific —~~er~~” or —~~er~~” sites.⁴³ However, with this emphasis on power, a politics of sacred space develops as these sites are constantly involved in establishing power-dynamics based on property, position and exclusion. As a surplus of symbolic meanings becomes available for appropriation, which makes contestation unavoidable, these sites must constantly be protected and defended in order to establish authentic and legitimate ownership.⁴⁴ It is, also, in this legitimatisation of sacred space that ritual plays an important role. Chidester and Linenthal claim that ritualisation is a practice of space, which through its performative action, sets certain spaces apart from the ordinary lived environment.⁴⁵

With the division of sacred space into either a poetics or politics of sacred space it is easy to fall prey to think of sacred space either in terms of a transcendental reality far removed from any cultural influences, or a culturally ritualised space without any inherent significance attributed to the space itself. However, Belden C. Lane points out that a sacred place speaks with its own voice, even though the voice is heard by culturally conditioned ears. Furthermore, even when there is this perception of an —~~er~~,” the space,

⁴³ Chidester and Linenthal, 6, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

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itself, is always mediated by cultural processes of spatial production.⁴⁶ Lane argues for an interdisciplinary approach to sacred space that involves —both the social scientist and the poet of inner and outer landscapes.”⁴⁷ There is, according to Belden, a need for a creative and imaginative mapping of the cultural landscape in order to determine the exercising power inherent in place.⁴⁸

When we think of the sacred in terms of the *barzakh*, emphasis is neither on a powerful and divine experience, nor on the sacralisation of space through ritual or mythic narratives. Rather, the *barzakh* discloses sacred space as being at once radically different and essentially the same. The power of the *barzakh* is found in the fact that the *barzakh* is ultimately the world of the imagination. In Ibn al-Arabi's thoughts the *barzakh* as imagination is also the world of domination as it has a greater power and strength than sensation. Imagination has the ability and power to display traces in the world of sensation. In Ibn al-Arabi's thought's imagination is not a romantic fantasy, but an ontological force that makes something appears.⁴⁹ In terms of a poetics of sacred space, the *barzakh* as the dividing line between existence and nonexistence allows any —human being who possesses an imagination and the power to imagine” to witness things as real and unreal.⁵⁰ Although, the *barzakh* brings presence to the things perceived, it is through cultural and

⁴⁶ Belden C. Lane, “Giving Voice To Place: Three Models For Understanding American Sacred Space,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal Of Interpretation* 11. 1 (2001): 70. See also his discussion of a third category of sacred space, the phenomenological category, 66-72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-74.

⁴⁹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 260.

⁵⁰ Chittick, *The Sufi-Path of Knowledge*, 204.

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personal memories, rituals and myths that meanings and attributes are inscribed. The *barzakh*, as limit, engages in a politics of space as it divides and defines, thus holding within itself the power of exclusion and inclusion. However, the *barzakh* contains within itself all possible things.

From it become manifest loci which receive corporeal meanings in sensory and imaginal form. It is a noble existent, whose meaning is the Real. It is the Real through whom takes place the creation of every existent thing other than the Real. It is the meaning within which are immutable established and fixed entities of the possible things. It receives the reality of where, the containership of place, the level of rank, and the name of locus. (II 283. 9)⁵¹

The sacred becomes a way of looking at the world in terms of —a entering and an emergence.⁵² This quality of the sacred is also the theme in recent research on the role of the sacred in the practice and performance of drama. In *Sacred Theatre*, Carl Lavery defines the sacred as —a form of liminal experience, an empty fullness, a full emptiness.⁵³ Peter Malekin sees the sacred as the —extraordinary presence of emptiness.⁵⁴ In Franc Chamberlain's definition, the sacred is at once a —sense of flowing" and a —sense of doubleness."⁵⁵ However, it is Ralph Yarrow's observation that the experience of the sacred can be approached as a mode of performance, which invites, generates and requires participation that links the sacred to our

⁵¹ Chittick, *The Sufi-Path of Knowledge*, 134.

⁵² Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 234.

⁵³ Ralph Yarrow, ed., *Sacred Theatre* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 16, 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16, 22. See also Chapter Two, "Terminologies and Categorizations of the Sacred," 33-63 for a detailed discussion of the sacred in terms of dialogical tool and not merely a given category.

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analysis of the *barzakh* as a space establishing an aesthetics of appearing.⁵⁶

By recognizing the dynamic presence of atmosphere established in the relational encounter between subject and object, the experience of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra emerges as a —sacred aesthetics. Ralph Yarrow states that it is the recognition of the absence at the centre, —no parameters, no co-ordinates, only the in-between: but crucially the awareness of that in-between-ness. . . . On either side is the going in and the coming out; the losing and the gaining, the de- and the re-.”⁵⁷

William S. Haney II argues that sacred theatre can be defined as a —voiding of thought,” whereby a shift in consciousness takes place by which the boundaries between subject and object, self and other are blurred. Thus, the sacred and the profane converge in a —liminal zone of sacred experience, the in-between-ness we transit whenever we encounter and go beyond pairs of opposites.”⁵⁸ Haney claims that the sacred space of intersubjectivity deconstructs ordinary places and spaces in which everyday thinking and being occurs. Through language and the interpretation of specific cultural contexts a person can cross-over into a space or —presence” where there is an absence of exterior boundaries. It is in this liminal domain that a dis-identification with the profane exterior occurs. Within this experience of the sacred there is movement towards an inner space and an awareness of presence, while a simultaneous fading-out of external realities. The liminal in-betweenness of sacred space carries within itself an aura of presence that in

⁵⁶ Yarrow, ed., *Sacred Theatre*, 28.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

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certain moments of performative experience can affect a person emotionally.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it can be argued that such an unsettling and emotional moment dislocates a person momentarily, rendering such a person, for that moment in time, placeless and unconfined.

By thinking of sacred space in terms of a creative and neutral space, facilitating a perceptual —event” wherein the play of appearances instigates an imaginative journey, both outward and inward, new possibilities are opened up to be explored in further studies. Furthermore, exploring a concept of beauty as discussed by Sharon Kim, whereby the sacred is not isolated to certain situations, places and rituals, but is brought into view in everyday lived experiences by revealing “what one had already thought to have seen and known,” unexpected dimensions are added to the experience of places such as the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra.⁶⁰ This very —spiritual” and unfathomable revelation of beauty that is at once existent and nonexistent, —a comingling of light and darkness” was already understood by medieval scholars such as Ibn al-Arabi, which prompted him to write the following poem.

To the moon belong annihilation
In every respect
and to the sun irradiation
and subsistence.
The face that is beautiful
with every loveliness
grants us cheerfulness
and encounter. (IV 198. 19)⁶¹

⁵⁹ Yarrow, ed., *Sacred Theatre*, 70, 76.

⁶⁰ Kim, *Literary Epiphany in the Novel*, 146.

⁶¹ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 327.

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The concept of the *barzakh*, within an aesthetics of appearing, also offers opportunities to engage Asian models of aesthetics. For example in the Japanese aesthetics of *awaré*, from the Heian period, we can trace elements of the in-between quality of the *barzakh*. *Awaré* is —an intense emotion felt in response to beauty, especially one of a subtle, ephemeral nature, or a response to the inherent sadness of life itself.”⁶² Marc Keane explains that *awaré* is an aesthetic quality which is usually known as *mono-no-awaré* and that the word *awaré* comes from the sounds *ah!* and *hare!* both words indicating an expression of surprise.⁶³ Keane also describes *awaré* as —an epiphany at the discovery of beauty in the *pathos* of life,” and that a person when confronted with such beauty will react with an overflow of emotion.⁶⁴ What links *awaré* to our concept of the *barzakh* is that it indicates the simultaneous existence of emotion and thought in the witnessing of form. Antanas Andrijauskas defines *mono-no-awaré* as —the ability to discern and bring out the unique inner charm of every existing phenomenon or thing, to identify oneself with the object being contemplated, to empathize with its mysterious beauty.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, the category of *mono-no-awaré* can be explained as the —*chama* unfolding in the harmony of feeling and reason, in which the emotional attitude (*aware*) of the subject fuses with the object

⁶² Marc P. Keane, *Japanese Garden Design* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1996), 172. See also Lauren Prusinski, —*Wabi-Sabi, Mono no Aware, and Ma: Tracing Traditional Japanese Aesthetics Through Japanese History*” *Studies on Asia* IV 2.1 (2012): 25. http://studiesonasia.illinoisstate.edu/seriesIV/documents/2-Prusinkski_001.pdf (accessed July 07, 2013)

⁶³ Keane, *Japanese Garden Design*, 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁵ Antanas Andrijauskas, —Specific Features of Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics,” *Dialogue and Universalism* 13. 1/2 (2003): 205.

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(*mono*) being contemplated.”⁶⁶ Similar to our argument that the *barzakh* can only become a sensuous and aesthetic encounter when both subject and object participate in the experience, *mono-no-awaré* accepts the existence of a spiritual or emotional quality within the object, which can only be understood and recognised in a fleeting moment of a perceptual and emotional encounter. Beauty becomes a light that shines brightly, but is also at the same time a fleeting sensation resulting in a powerful awareness of the continual changes occurring on the journey through life. Since beauty is simultaneously experience, imagination and transformation, analytical reason is replaced by an intuitive and emotional awareness of something already inherent in any encounter of being-in-the-world.

Sally Shivnan captures this experience of fleetingness in her description of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra’s beauty as melancholy with a bittersweetness. The experience presented by the courtyard gardens offers at one and the same time —*sole and sadness*” for it reminds its occupants of the —*transience of beauty*.” Shivnan describes her experience as —*witnessing the end of something and the feeling of wakening, really wakening*.”⁶⁷ This hint of an ethereal quality belonging to the forms of the garden is also captured by the film *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger*, and best described by Jonas Mekas in his reminiscence of Marie Menken and her films.

They are like a flower garden . . . you can sit in it, you can sit among the flowers of Marie Menken, and they will fill you with sweetness and

⁶⁶ Andrijauskas, —*Specific Features of Traditional Japanese Medieval Aesthetics*,” 206.

⁶⁷ Sally Shivnan, —*Gringa Morisca*,” in *The Best Travel Writing 2005: True Stories From Around the World*, ed. James O’Reilly, Larry Habegger and Sean O’Reilly (Berkeley: Publishers Group West, 2005), 134.

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heavenly smells, and a certain rare happiness, a joy of life—yes, and maybe sadness, too, but it's all like sitting among the flowers and seeing your own life, very close to you, feeling your own life, and all other lives, and having some insight into what it may be all about, and you are touched by the smell of these flowers, and you feel refreshed and very, very fine, and looking forward.⁶⁸

From this point of view it is possible to link the *barzakh* with the qualities of Japanese aesthetics, because both focus on discerning the underlying rhythms existing in the world, the play of light and shadow, stasis and movement, texture and depth. This aspect of the *barzakh*, therefore, can prove fertile ground for further investigation, especially in the study of the religious dynamics of garden aesthetics.

Epistemologically, the *barzakh* can be considered a map that allows its user a choice of pathways to take. One of its most important features is that holds within it spaces, both real and imaginary worlds. As navigational tool, the *barzakh* offers its user a panoramic view whereby different areas become interconnected and classified according to certain spatial practices. At the same time the map of the *barzakh* tangibly presents us with the —Bal,” both the map as —Bal” and the —Bal” places the map represents. Thus, on our journey the *barzakh* is always both presence and absence. On the one hand, the spaces of the *barzakh* open themselves up for the wayfarer to explore in terms of a sensuous and corporeal aesthetic encounter. On the other hand, these spaces are representations of space, frames of reference graspable by those who know their codes and signs. Furthermore, it is also possible to

⁶⁸ Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), 414.

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trace the *barzakh*'s path along a journey that offers us multiple entrances into real and imaginative spaces.

In this thesis I have presented a creative reading of the space of the *barzakh* as a map of the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra in order to highlight their reality as simultaneously existent and nonexistent. Following the *barzakhian* map, we embarked on an epiphanic journey shaped by the coming together of kinetic and haptic movement through the gardens of the Alhambra, and dynamically intensive moments of awareness and insight. Both "*Gringa Morisca*" and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* provide us the opportunity to enter into a world conditioned by movement and informed by a spatial practice actively involved in the structuring of the garden's reality. "*Gringa Morisca*" and *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* not only map for us the space of the *barzakh*, they visualise the invisible and as such visually present us with moments of dramatic insight. Furthermore, the witnessing of this drama does not isolate body or mind, but immerses the complete human being in perceiving the simultaneous coming-to-be and erasure of new —worlds." Thus, following the route of Ibn al-Arabi's *barzakh* through the courtyard gardens of the Alhambra, we embarked on a journey. In this epiphanic journey we discovered the unexpected, a practice of space whereby the ordinary, through perception and emotion, changed into the extra-ordinary. Thus, the concept of the *barzakh* is an intersubjective and transformative heuristic tool, which brings together spatiality, physicality and imagination through an eventful production of being-in-the-world.

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