Spatial Excavation of Psyche and Family Dynamics in Stephen Karam's The Humans: A Psychogeographical Reading

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Abstract: The American playwright Stephen Karam explores the human psyche and relationships in The Humans (2016) by employing the spatial operations of the props on the stage. The play presents the gathering of the Blake family in their daughter and her boyfriend's new apartment on a Thanksgiving dinner. The article examines how the description of the details of the place reflects the characters' fear, pain, trauma, relationships and secrets. It aims to show how the characters' psychologies are depicted through the physical setting of the dark apartment and its menacing atmosphere. The study follows the theory of place in approaching the text. It tries to analyze the relationship between the place and the characters and how it develops a type of a discourse operating reciprocally to make the unseen layers of the characters' lives visible. The dramatic spatial and technical innovation will be the core of the analysis.

Keywords: family, primal scene, psyche, psychogeography, spatial analysis

1.Introduction

Within a psycho-geographical framework, Stephen Karam's The Humans maps its characters' internal world on situational and spatial layers devised by the author. This framework shows human emotions through every single detail of the two-floor apartment The setting serves as an external humanistic landscape mirroring the characters' interiors, let alone the way certain props act as administrators of their responses and attitudes. The interplay between mind and space builds a third dimension of spatial recognition, referred to as 'psychogeography'.

Psychogeography has emerged as a field from the Situationist International Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. It depicts a brain-oriented geographical landscape, whose aim is to inform about man's psychological state through the details of a space. This field focuses on the created emotional responses toward a certain place. Individuals start to form an emotional and psychological drawing of the place (Coverley 2006: 88). Psychogeography, as a term had been coined by the Marxist theorist, filmmaker and critic, Guy Debord (1931-1994). In his "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography", Debord defines psychogeography as a concept that is based on describing and exploring places away from their

original functionality and material physicality. Debord suggests that conceiving an environment is based on the individuals' emotions and behaviors. He states that:

Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery (2006: 8).

Differently specialized scholars in neurosis and geography see that the neurotic system passes signals to the brain to perceive any place quite attached to the psychological and emotional world. In Brain Landscape: The Coexistence of Brain and Architecture, John Paul Eberhard reveals how the environment deeply affects man's cognitive processes and emotional experiences. He discusses how the brain perceives and responds to spatial arrangements, lighting, acoustics, and other architectural elements, denoting that certain architectural designs can either enhance or detract humans from well-being and productivity (2009: 61). In addition, Coverley asserts in his Psychogeography (2006) that the world, which has long been formed in the brain, is primarily dependent on the 'value system' established by past experiences. Part of this 'value system' is the harsh experiences that man has gone through, whether natural or artificial. Coverley postulates that catastrophes, for instance, create a sense of dislocation and disorientation, especially in urban places, leading thus to a profound feeling of loss and entrapment. In catastrophes, the city appears momentarily strange to its inhabitants, granting it either a vision of "heaven or hell" (2006: 38).

In the 1990s, artistic works started to follow psychogeographical perspective in exploring spaces, exemplifying Thomas de Quincy's tradition of the writer as a walker and Baudelaire's 'flaneur', the mental traveler. In both examples, people are engaged in a psychological and emotional realm in introspective and retrospective manners, thus affecting their responses. Characters in a literary work would become writers of the place revealing "the eternal behind the commonplace" (Coverley 2006: 48). They use their imagination when they are overwhelmed by the forceful power of space. In her article “Psychogeography, Nostalgia and Heroic Metamorphosis in Leila Aboulela’s Bird Summons”, Iman El Sayed Raslan makes a reference to psychogeography as part of the theory of literary psychogeography, where psychogeography “examines the nexus between psychology, geographical environment, and literature” (2024: 365). In literature, psychogeography expands to encompass ways of examining urban spaces including putting a scrutinizing eye on the city's contemporary shortcomings. Psychogeographical measures and techniques have become a basic yardstick in literary criticism, especially in texts

that explicitly discuss spatiality against emotional and psychological dilemmas (Coverley 2006: 28).

In psychogeography, the interpreter of space may follow a situational retrospective approach to past memories, and therefore, the place would be a means of liberating the past suppressed tensions and conflicts. The idea of introspective and retrospective analysis of space is bridging a connection between Freudian 'primal scene' and Gaston Bachelard's 'topoanalysis'. In his letters to Wilhem Fliess (1887-1904), Freud proposes that the psychic structures are influenced by the repressions of the past, buried in the unconscious. Such repressions have been generated in a spatial "primal scene" and they would be excavated in the present time as a "deferred action" penetrating into the normal life. Freud defines the space of such deferred actions as a "specific region" (Freud 1980: 239). Freud's readers see that this 'specific region' as the space where happens an oscillation or interaction between the ego, where repressions are buried, and the conscious life, where the ego's objects reside. It announces a cartographic aspect of man's psyche, drawing thus "the continuous spatial exchanges that alternates between outward compulsions and inward absorption" (Bielińska and Lipszyc 2024: 7). Freud also affirms in his letters that with the constitution of this 'specific region,' subjects would develop defensive strategies, which he calls "protective fiction" which help the individual to make a compromise between the repressed unconscious and the conscious revelations. They may take, among other shapes, the form of reveries or memory fragments (Freud 1980: 239). This can be traced for instance in Erik's long reveries he takes when he is drenched into the dusty windows, or in Mommy's blurred utterances exposing the severe fragmentation of her memory.

Bachelard supplements Freud's psychoanalytic attachments to space through his concept of topoanalysis. In his Poetics of Space, Bachelard depicts an allowance for the "rememorial[sic] sense of the past to infuse present consciousness". But he reverses the spatial directory when he emphasizes the way space penetrates into the unconscious and affects it. Bachelard differs from Freud in giving privilege to the dynamism and ever-shifting qualities of the human psyche away from fixating it into the unconscious. He essentially reckons on the effect of space on the human psychology (Bielińska and Lipszyc 2024: 50). Both Freud and Bachelard stress the idea that the psychological life can be structured by returning to the formative scenes. In other words, Bachelard's topoanalysis can be read as a spatialized version of Freud's 'return of the repressed'.

Relying on the theory of place, Karam's The Humans can be viewed within topographic and psychoanalytic frame. In Karam's play, the characters walk within the boundaries of the duplex and gradually set free their autobiographical elements, revealing their insides through an individualistic interpretation of the place. They

go through a retrospective experience and locate their response to the apartment. They unconsciously withdraw to memories of situations which affected their psychological and emotional construction and portray a particular version of that place accordingly. The portrayal cannot be based on a mere imaginative path to the place. Rather, the place becomes a mirror reflecting the hidden realms of their psyche and emotions. They become the writer-walkers of that place. The only dividing line between the mental traveler and psychogeography is the issue of detachment and attachment. In the case of the flaneur, the writer-walker personae are originally detached from the place (Coverley 2006: 42).

Furthermore, Debord maintains that a psychogeographer uses tools to analyze spaces, among which is the principles of dérive'. In his "Theory of the Dérive", Debord defines 'dérive' as a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances (2006: 63). Following the principle of dérive, the place is experienced in an unstructured, spontaneous way, allowing the environment to influence one's flow of emotions and perception and thus interpret places accordingly. The environmental effects can be applied well to the situation in which Erik's family finds themselves. Their involvement in the spatial realm of the duplex comes spontaneously with no previous planning. That makes the family's behaviors come in response to the forces of the environment.

In The Humans, the Manhattan apartment has drawn its meaning from its new context. Brigid's new apartment's commonplace elements are driven into a meaning unrelated to its unbiased construction, shaped by the family's psychology. It is obvious that Freudian primal scene, resides in the events of September 11, which encompassed the family’s painful experience of losing their younger daughter, let alone losing their homes. The repressed sense of fear and danger is roaming above. They reflect their repressions on the spaces and places. The poetics of space ranges from the sense of entrapment to the sense of liberation. In the cases of entrapment, the place makes individuals find themselves enclosed tightly with other people, thus creating a sense of intimacy and belonging to each other more than they have ever thought. In such enclosures, places may have the power to initiate mechanisms to irritate and grasp the individual's psychological responses, releasing feelings, memories, and long-hidden experiences and tensions. Whereas in liberation cases, surveyors of places may use the surroundings and activate the spatial elements to reflect their interiors. In a revelational process, spaces and places act as transportation mediums for one's feelings and relations (Bachelard 2014: 108)

Writers tend to embed their agendas through mapping spaces, architectural elements, and furniture included in the text, creating, thus, a certain type of dialectic between the characters and their surroundings. The French thinker Guston Bachelard's theoretical premises emphasize such a dialectic. In his The Poetics of

Space (2014), first published in 1999, Bachelard explores the importance of studying spaces to understand characters and their emotional crises better. He relates his 'topoanalysis' to the immemorable domain of memory and imagination:

> Topoanalysis, then, would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives. In the theater of the past constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant rules. At times, we think we know ourselves in time when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability, a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to 'suspend' its flight. In its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time. That is what space is for (Bachelard 2014: 30).

Therefore, the space accompanying time contributes to the building up of the psychology of a human being. Spaces are part of any phenomenological investigation that goes through the hypothesis of one's stored experiences, when a spatial relation is built, the person involved will construct his poetic image of space. For Bachelard, no single space or place stands as neutral in its meaning because any surveyor would configure the real meaning of a place using his imagination, which Bachelard calls 'space of imagination'. In this space, ideas are never definitive but rather continuously changing and developing:

> Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination… images do not adapt themselves very well to quiet ideas, or above all, to definitive ideas. The imagination is ceaselessly imagining and enriching itself with new images (Bachelard 2014: 47).

In this way, Bachelard explores the imaginative spheres that man explores when he is in a certain place rather than focusing on the well-constructed furniture of a house or building. Bachelard emphasizes the idea of a house, depicting it, whether real or imaginary, as the space that shelters man's entity which exceeds his physicality. Therefore, places and residences do not all have the domestic spirit of homely protection embracing human emotional and psychological tensions and reliefs. In his Poetics of Space, Bachelard compares each part of the house to the

subjects' moral and psychological state. For him, 'cellars' by their darkness and fading entrances, would home the psychological tensions and repressions lying thoroughly beneath the psyche of the house's dwellers:

> Verticality is ensured by the polarity of cellar and attic, the marks of which are so deep that, in a way, they open up two very different perspectives for a phenomenology of the imagination. Indeed, it is possible, almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar (Bachelard 2014: 39).

Following Bachelard's psychological layers of the house, the family's surrounding the Thanksgiving dining table, is aspired by Brigid to make the apartment's basement a space for warmly familial gathering. But it proves later to be a space which homes the inner conflicts of each of the family's members, excavated by the darkness of the basement.

Bachelard is concerned with the poetic image inferred from a certain space, and thus analyzes the characters' psyches and imaginative powers in their attachments to space. Other theorists of space are mostly concerned with the tools of how to critique space within a more realistic perspective reckoning mostly on the ways space in a text would signify the political and cultural life of characters. In his Spatiality (2013), Robert T. Tally Jr., analyzes the way domestic spaces are critiqued. He discusses how a space with the help of its constituents can make sense and how its dwellers deal with these constituents. He calls such critiques as Geocriticism, which emphasizes the spatial materiality as much as it signifies man's relation to space from a cultural and political perspective. For instance, houses may strangely be dilapidated or unused, and furniture may seem more ornamental than functional, making the residence completely unhomely (Tally 2013: 115). Also, the homely spirit can create a domestic space by prevailing some sense of arrangement and concern. In both cases, the poetic image of a space is framed by the real rather than imaginative constituents to be responsible activators of a certain meaning accorded to space. In The Humans, the apartment reveals through its tattered furniture and dilapidated walls the poverty of the neighborhood in that part of Manhattan after the events. Furthermore, the family's desperate attempts to make the place tidier end by leaving everything to shelter themselves into the basement

In her study, "Confronting the Labor-Market and Housing Crises in Post-Recession U.S. Drama: Lisa D'Amour's Detroit and Stephen Karam's The Humans" (2025), Ana Fernández-Caparrós describes The Humans as one of the post-recessionary plays which draws the effect of the first half of the twenty-first century economic crisis in America. Fernández-Caparrós ponders this idea by

relating the characters' dissatisfaction about the idea of unattainable ownership with their downward mobility in Brigid's apartment (86). The family come carrying an "American dream of homeownership" which is encountered by a "dilapidated setting portrays literally and realistically the dwelling that a young couple could afford to rent in a metropolis like New York City in the second decade of the twenty-first century" (Fernández-Caparrós 2025: 89). Furthermore, The Humans has also been approached from multidisciplinary perspective, when exploring its universal themes, societal relations and human experience formation. In their critical study "Realism Revisited: Language as Reflection in 'The Humans' through Lukács and Austin Lenses" (2024), Zakiuddin Mohammed and Roseline Jesudas apply J.L. Austin's speech act theory and Georg Lukács's social realism in their literary analysis. By deploying a linkage between societal and linguistic lenses, the authors study how social and political milieu are reflected on the language used by the family members in the play (69).

In both studies mentioned above, the relation between man and place has not been as yet approached in The Humans as it is attempted in this study. This recent study contributes in bridging a gap in the scholarly research which emphasizes the interrelated ties between space and man and the way psychological and relational dynamics are activated by the topographic attribution of the place in which the family dwells.

2. Spatial excavation of psyche and family dynamics in *The Humans*

Toying with spatial exteriors and individual interiors, The Humans introduces an apartment-based family drama that involves the Blakes coming from Scranton in Pennsylvania for a Thanksgiving dinner. The family is invited by their younger daughter, Brigid, and her boyfriend, Rich (or Richard), to their newly unfurnished flat in Manhattan. Though a reviving reunion, the family seems unsatisfied because of their emotional and financial troubles, which tend to be accelerated on the surface because of the increasing dimness of the scary apartment as the play proceeds. The dinner has been overwhelmed by quiet conversations that are suppressed with fears, secrets and conflicts. The gathering is accompanied by the apartment's few props, constituting a character-like figure that seems to breathe and live with the family.

The description of the setting start-up is made to respond to the reciprocal interaction between the physical outer world and the psychological inner worlds of the characters. In the play's stage directions, Karam seems to introduce his characters by charting a mental and emotional map siding with the spatial path that passes through the light to intrude into a Chinatown ground-floor duplex, sinking into a dungeon-like space and thus drawing a ghostly apartment. Through the way spatial elements are spotted by writer's scrutinizing eye, tension is being put into a

real architectural construction. The way the audience would follows that spatial map shows the intensity of the sense of suffocation and entrapment experienced by the people living in similar districts of Manhattan. Living in these very close buildings, separated by narrow air shafts that hardly seem sufficient for the entrance of light and fresh air, may suggest how the dwellers of these places live. Karam says the setting " gives the sense that you are at the bottom of these buildings, almost like feeling in a hole, being simply entrapped" (Baron 2022, August 13). Having this feeling, the family shares the overwhelming sense of entrapment that the American people witnessed in the aftermath of the two towers' blowing. Despite all people's attempts to recover from the shock, fear has become part of New York's life, a place that "erupts insane anxiety" (Baron 2022, August 13).

Consequently, the father, Erik, never approves of his daughter's residence in Manhattan. He carries this magnified sense of entrapment and loss. He relates the apartment to what he had gone through during the events of September 11. At the time of blowing the two towers, Erik joined his daughter, Aimee, for a work interview in down Manhattan. He remembers every detail of the day, and the "strip of light visible beneath" the basement hallway assists in recalling this memory (Karam 2016: 66). Erik remembers how it took hours to find Aimee in the crowd after the devastating event This sense of loss was already engraved in the elderly generation, as exemplified by Momo. She was immediately devastated when Aimee wheeled Momo down to the basement through the 'groaning elevator'. By her muddling question about where to go, Momo articulates her continuous fear of being lost.

The memory revives the idea of the place when it turned into an empty space haunted by ghosts and shadowy buildings covered with dust, telling the "history of entrapment murmuring the pain of an empty shell" (Baron 2022, August 13). In The Poetics of Space, Bachelard asserts that empty places remain haunted even though they are not inhabited. The more the place is vacant, the more it is inhabited by the daydreamers (2014: 40). Empty places for Karam imply more horror than places occupied with furniture and props would have, believing that "the more empty [sic] the frame [is], the more it implies horror" (Baron 2022, August 13). Structuring the couple's duplex as a microcosm of New York, in its unfurnished and poor posture, justifies how the family responds when first entering it. Financial anxiety is one of the things they are worried about. It is another ghost haunting this apartment.

Drowning in discomfort, secrets, and conflicts, Erik is brought into daydreaming whenever he feels suffocated. He constantly seizes the chance to have a reverie. His dreams are fearful because they are unidentified and remain shadowy. Nevertheless, he needs such an escape. The world for Erik is drawn as a surrealistic one, where "these two states, dream, and reality, which are seemingly so

contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality" (Coverley 2006: 73). In discussing the relationship between memory and daydreaming, Bachelard asserts: "All memory has to be reimagined. For we have in our memories micro-films that can only be read if they are lighted by the bright light of the imagination" (Bachelard 2014: 175). Erik feels confused because of the shadows he sees or, in fact, imagines. The images he visualizes are very obtrusive and hardly perceptible, yet they remain effective and engaging. On the one hand, these images express his isolation as he is being withdrawn into himself. On the other hand, Erik's traumatized memory may have failed to decipher his dreams because they are created by the "association of memory and imagination" (Bachelard 2013: 16). Brigid's flat is the spatial ground where this association could be grasped and deciphered.

Deirdre, like her husband Erik, suffers from conflicts concerning her being a Catholic conservative who remains in fear that her daughters get away from the right path. Also, she is living a financial nightmare as she thinks of office managers, a monster-like figure "with no teeth on his back" (Karam 2016:55). She is always complaining of being overworked and underpaid. Deirdre's doubts and fears seem to be exorcised on the window, which makes the outside darkness its background. Her doubts and the ebb of her old age have been exemplified as shadows that she hardly recognizes.

The other example of the traumatized generation in the family is Erik's Mom, an 81-year-old woman in a wheelchair. Mom has dementia, and her illness is made worse by her fits of temper. The family finds difficulty in communicating with her because her words are mumbled, especially when she experiences a fit. She, like the other family members, has been paralyzed by her physical entrapment to the wheelchair and her lost memory. Momo liberates her fears with the soundscape of mumbling, which echoes long-buried tensions. When the family grows tense, her mumbled words grow quick and loud as it happens when Erik confesses his guilt of betraying Deirdre, Momo turns to be very anxious:

> MOMO: (mumbling unintelligibly until she exits) . . . wheres'll her annear . . . do you go hole in a where do you go hole in a wheres do go hole in a where to go hole in a wheres . . . where do we go hole in a… (Karam 2016: 162).

Benjamin Lee, The Guardian's reviewer of The Humans asserts that all men are categorized as human under the tent of resentment, conflict, and secrets, which "all have a believably mundane and human quality to them" (Lee 2021) Therefore, the Blakes share these troubles with all the start-of-millennium people. The fears the Blakes have can be felt by any New Yorker or even by any human at that time of terror and financial crisis post 9/11. That is why the family is chosen as an

American family that shares its predicaments with the very audience of the play (Baron 2022, August 13). Karam emphasizes that part of his intention in writing The Humans is to put human fears on the spot by utilizing the familiar architecture and familiar spaces in an unfamiliar way. The play starts and ends with a sense of unease and entrapment, a state that is well signified by the place's position and constituents. The apartment appears monotonous and suffocating with its narrow air shafts separating between the neighboring towering buildings, allowing very little natural light. The whole place is dilapidated and rotten, reflecting fear and anxiety by "pre-war features [having it] coated in layers of faded off white paint, rendering the space curiously monotone. The rooms are worn, the floors are wrapped" (Karam, 2016: 9). From an archeological point of view, and in some literary works, dilapidated and worn-out places may suggest hidden memories that are revealed layer by layer, accompanied by sheer silence which may irritate delusions, excavating thus hidden secrets (Levick 2022: 41). When Momo is at the apartment, she tends to have delusions of seeing some people to talk to. Erik himself tends to go daydreaming whenever he stares through the window. He always envisions a shadow of a woman, exorcised like a demon.

The apartment seems like a haunted house for the family because it lacks fresh air and light. The place grows dimmer as time approaches dinner. The union of the family is haunted by a mixture of care and resentment that overwhelms the relations between Erik and his wife, the supposedly loving young couple, and the two daughters to the other members of the family. There is always a blend of intimacy and detachment. Nevertheless, this mixture is never sounded loudly by the characters themselves as much as it is articulated through the disturbing physicality of the duplex. Under the influence of the flushing sound, the slathered paint, and snake-like cables hissing on the wall, the characters receive their existence experience overwhelmed by their feelings and troubles.

Starting with the invitation to this family reunion, Brigid, the younger daughter, seems to be the most caring in the family. The moment she appears; she pervades a relieving tone through her laughter with her sister. As she was packing to move, she prepared a bag of gifts, including framed photos of the family members Brigid attempts to solidify this gathering by presenting the framed photos as this occasion's gifts. In The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City, the editor, Jeremy Tambling, asserts that photographs archive the history of events that excavate memories layer by layer (2016: 351). For instance, in her caring attitude, Brigid takes the role of the archeologist in the memory revival of her family members to make them feel happy. Giving these framed photos as gifts is a matter that first pleases her parents. However, the atmosphere has reversed to revive the other side of their state, the resenting and burdened spectacle of memory. Erik looks

dreamily at his photo, which he sees as 'gold', a full revelation of Erik's character, not only in its content but in how it acts. The family photo takes hold of Erik's imagination and actively postulates itself as an open gate to a far-fetched world inhabited by memories. It works in petrifying, in a moment, the suffocated dreams of the family, as it opens into a long-entrapped aspiration of each one of the family. That is why they tend to be reminded of their shortages when they see their version of the family photo. After all these years, the photo has reminded them of what they have come up with today; it is never better than what they have now in the present.

Deirdre's stress, which she tries to hide, is confirmed later when she is in the bathroom immediately before going downstairs. She takes a ball of stress and squeezes it to relax. Part of her worries are due to her religious conservatism and her fear of her daughters' violating behavior. That is why her gifts and messages for her daughters always revolve around representations of the Virgin Mary, whom she believes to be a protective force for her daughters. Furthermore, under such influence, for Deirdre, the memory of the place in the background of the family framed photo, showing the shores of Wildwood, which she yearned to revisit, awakens in her, her being overworked and of her husband's negligence of her needs and simple dreams. In Aimee's case, the photo reminds her of her physical shortages, describing herself as an elephant in the picture. Frustrated by the consequences, Brigid becomes relatively harsh to her father, blaming her family for not providing her with the money she needs for her studies and a respectful residence.

Karam’s talent appears distinguished in his emphasis on the spatial elements of the play to build up its thematic and setting structure. Each prop on stage is felt to be a controlling entity, significantly drawing the atmosphere within which the characters revolve. The temporal element also proves its significance because each moment is counted, giving the feeling that the present people have the sense that time is passing slowly. The characters have been identified following their location in the duplex. When each prop is accurately analyzed, no real description or characterization is developed concerning any of the characters in the play. They all seem the same; they are all humans who are similar in their troubles regardless of their types. What distinguishes the play is that it does not rely on the well-devised plot or action as much as by the way the characters are attached and react to the details of the apartment. For instance, the father proves to be the character who is most overwhelmed by the details of the duplex. He scrutinizes every detail and tries to figure out its benefit and appropriacy. In the stage directions, at different times in the play, the tight relationship between Erik and the window is well postulated:

> Erik is drawn to the window, studies the surroundings…. Eriks stops staring out the window. Momo's focus remains primarily fixed toward the floor…. [Then] Erik has been staring out the window again—something outside caught his attention…. Erik sits in the window ledge trying to get reception…. (Karam 2016: 39-40).

Alongside the spatial and temporal detailed description, the sounds have served as alarming stimuli that recurrently announce reality, which most characters try to escape. From the very outset of the play, startling thuds from above the ceiling, the flushing sound of the upstairs bathroom, and the cracking narrow spiral staircase, which relates the two units of the apartment, depict the increasing tension and anxiety. Erik is put under the influence of these sounds, leading him rather to be awakened from his daydreaming. At their first entrance to the apartment, the family is invited by the:

> sickening THUD sounds from above the ceiling. Erik looks up. ERIK [What the hell was that?] He recovers. Gradually his attention shifts away from the noise; he continues to explore the space when— Another sickening THUD sounds from above, startling him. He looks up. ERIK [God, what the hell is that?] A toilet flush (Karam 2016: 10).

To the newcomers, the visual and auditory elements in the apartment are identifying elements of the place. This duplex's startling sounds and dim lights depict it as an individual with an identity.

The only soothing sound the family can enjoy in their gathering is the Christmas Litany of "Hail Mary." In their choral singing of prayers, the family tries to have Momo join in to feel belonging. Singing 'Jesus' suggests a nostalgic attempt to regain the past spiritual faith that may be related to Momo and Deirdre, who represent Catholic conservatism. Nevertheless, Momo's mumbling grows so disturbing that they stop the celebration. Momo's mumbling indicates the arousing psychological unrest that a Christmas Litany can hardly cure. It is a reminder of the chaotic blend of feelings that the apartment has exorcised. This momentary family joy is forced to an end by another startling thud from above that announces the necessity of moving to the basement as a safer space. When scrutinizing the writings about the New York proceeding on September 11, Alice Levick, in her Memory and the Built Environment, demonstrates that after being traumatized by the events, people's memories have become void of the sense of nostalgia to return

to a ruined homely space. The concept of nostalgia in the city has changed and become obsolete because people in America ceased to think about their cities the same way they used to prior to September 11. Levick also maintains that after the traumatic events, people's memory converts its mechanisms because everyone would fear "directly looking at the haunted spaces of the past that now mean too much (Levick 2022: 131-132). People started to have different perceptions of the places they have worked hard to build and glorify. The place has become a crucible containing their horrible memories which they wanted to forget.

In The Humans, the Blakes have carried the traumatic event in their minds, and the moment they enter the apartment, their traumatized memory is sparked by its constituents and auditory and visual effects. The anxiety Erik feels and his refusal that his daughter would live in Manhattan, deprives him of being nostalgic to the ruins of his city. Rather, he needs to escape the place and all its memories. Momo also witnesses the same anxious nostalgia. When the Christmas Litany is sung, Momo first enjoys and joins the family's singing. Her joy, nevertheless, triggers the memory of the past with a sense of relief and happiness that comes to her like the breeze of Heaven. Later, these happy recollections enliven the memory of the loss she had witnessed, extinguishing thus this momentary joy. The arousing fear created by the recollection of the past mounts, increasing her mumbling into a chaotic and sickly fit of temper, a matter that confuses them all and makes them stop singing.

Auditory objectification is accompanied by a visual one, which is introduced most currently by mirrors, windows, and reflexive objects, against which the characters could envisage their interiors. However, with all mirror-like objects, the vision is not clear because most of these objects tend to be covered with dirt. The windows of the main room and bathroom and the bathroom's mirror, though they have LED lights, seem to have an unclear vision for Deirdre. Eric has always been predominantly attached to the window whenever he has a chance as if he were to be swallowed into a mysterious realm of imagination and daydreams that he is willing to inspect. His daughters consider him a constantly scrutinizing detective, believing that he longs to investigate through these unseen worlds by himself.

As the evening approaches and Thanksgiving dinner is to take place, the familial tension starts to soothe. The aged couple's relationship remains characterized by "tension and care," especially after the father talks about his nightmare and troubles, mentioning the shadow of the faceless woman. The visual landscape of the window will turn into a two-half mirror projecting the image of the two together, yet each drowning in his half of the mirror. It must be noted that in most visions that overwhelm Erik, the shadow of a woman is apparent. It takes

Erik far away for a reason, which is known later to foreshadow the sense of guilt and betrayal.

Moving to the basement is aspired to be a safer and quieter space to celebrate the family's gathering. The path to the basement runs through the spiral staircase, and "the whole building [that] groans at times" (Karam 2016:96), none of which reflects ease or proves illuminating. In its details and simple decoration, the downstairs' simple props gather to form, at first glance, a warm, inviting glow. On a second thought, the basement opens into less natural light than the upstairs' shaft window allows. Another long vestibule leads to the small kitchen. The supposedly warming atmosphere of the basement revives the talk of Erik's hope in building a lake house. His hope is again hampered by the septic system of the house that needs to be changed before building the house. The talk on the septic system is orchestrated by the 'toilet flush' that does not spare the basement. The mechanism of sound effects, used in the basement through the kitchen stuff, proposes a harmonious familial gathering communicating and working together. They are playing with joy and intimacy like friends. The basement's details, like the upstairs', simultaneously sound the characters' hard lives and predicaments. The water bubble stains coming from upstairs through the spiral staircase again serve as a reminder not only of Eric's daydreaming but also Richard's nightmares activated by the non-stopping voices and cracks coming through the spiral staircase, as he

> … just… you can hear a lot through the [hole where the spiral staircase is], just caught that you haven't been sleeping, though maybe—I've been having weird dreams all week, think it's because of the move… last night I was polishing a silver refrigerator and…my dog was caught inside it? …and I don't have a dog?/ …just weird stuff… (Karam 2016: 38).

With the coming of the evening, the relations among the family members become at ease. This easiness conveys the spatial stress witnessed throughout nearly half of the play. The spatial turn happens in sound and light's menacing and frightening effect. The closeness of the family helps overcome their tension When Erik recalls and tells the family about his nightmare, he feels less tense. The gathering around the table in the evening, though proves later no real familial reunion, has the effect of soothing the tensions of the family. They no longer startle because of the “thuds, loud and fast,” coming from upstairs; rather, they start to enjoy the creaking sound. Brigid tells Aimee:

> AIMEE: What are you doing?
> BRIGID: Showing Dad how creeky the floors are . . .
> ERIK Okay . . . you don't have to do that!

Aimee starts jumping around with her. At a certain point the jumping and stomping become more about Aimee and Brigid releasing a lot of stress.

> MOMENTS LATER---Aimee jumps with Brigid. At a certain point, their stomping becomes more about releasing stress…. They recover. Brigid playfully collapses on the floor, a bit exhausted. Aimee moves closer to the window for reception (Karam 2016: 67).

The cracking sound now signifies the characters' attempts to release their tension. Spatial elements, whether architectural, auditory, or visual, all correspond to the family members' interior state and serve as signifiers of their relations.

Alongside their parents' tensions, the two daughters, Brigid and Amiee, are loaded with continuous non-spared tribulation. Brigid, aspires to become an expert musician. She faces the obstacles of student debts of the private school, in addition to her frustration for being rejected to attend music courses more than once. Even in her relationship with her boyfriend, she does not seem to be matching, although financially, he seems to be more at ease. He has been her elder for ten years and has had psychological tensions because of some bad relations in the past. Amiee, the elder daughter of the Blakes, suffers from ulcerative colitis, which is the reason for dismissing her from her job as a lawyer because she is in constant need of the bathroom. The three younger characters represent the younger generation, which is more at ease adapting to the new post-September norms. They seem less traumatized than their parents. The daughters' first entrance onto the stage is flavored with their laughs, and their relationship announces their conformity to troubles. Even in their relationship with their parents, Brigid and Aimee seem less tense. Yet, the relationship tends to waver between care and tension because of generational moral disparity. Being more conforming to their stress, the new generation reunites the family to revive its solidarity.

The solidifying attempts are planned to revolve around the basement table to have Thanksgiving dinner. The table serves as a platform where light is going to be shed on each one of the characters. At the table, the atmosphere becomes more relieving. Nevertheless, the ghost of poverty still haunts the place. For the parents, poverty had consumed their age. That is why they consider Richard's chance to have his parents' ensuring money after the age of forty a good idea because it would save

him from old age overwork. They enjoy the talk about the food they have, and the sound of eating articulates the joyful atmosphere. Yet, this joyful atmosphere comes to an end when "religion [is put] at the table" (Karam 2016: 90). The main advocate for religion in the family is Deirdre, who seems more tense than the others, thus asserts that the family should have respect for religion. This point is the main point of departure between her and her daughters. Nevertheless, harmony is regained through the music played on Richard's Bluetooth speaker, sounding like the musical piece composed and played by Brigid, announcing her talent.

The problems the young generation suffers are all furnished on the dining table. However, the younger generation tends to be more compromising about their fears. Even in their night dreams, they are not haunted by the shadowy giant source of fear which their elderly witness. For instance, Brigid, in her dream, sees herself "falling into an ice cream cone made of grass and become a baby" (Karam 2016:88). The girl's dream reflects her yearning to revive the old days of childhood when responsibilities were not so exhausting. Brigid's sense of responsibility lets her think thoroughly about her parents' poverty. She tries to help her mother take care of Momo, which may cost a lot if they hire any nurse for help. Although her concern is personal and faceless shadows do not intensely squeeze dreams, like Erik's nightmare, the source of this tension is also related to the financial crises of the post-September events. Being in this entrapping place has triggered the memories of all the family members, especially when overwhelmed by darkness and silent moments.

Approaching the close of the celebration of Thanksgiving, the atmosphere becomes tense as the apartment grows dimmer. The family's predicaments revealed around the table are responded to by the basement's lights that extinguish one after another, leaving the family in darkness. Richard immediately announces, "Welcome to New York, guys…" (Karam 2016: 86), keeping his humorous tone to overcome the family's successive predicaments. Trying to adapt to the scary atmosphere created by darkness, Brigid pulls the chain suspended from the ceiling and fails to get light. The extinction of lights has paradoxically shed light on realities, suggestively magnifying the surface of the family's hidden secrets. Deirdre grows more cynical and sarcastic, highlighting the situation by mocking the shadowy figure in Erik's nightmares, the "She-With-No-Face, [who] strikes again!" (Karam 2016: 87). It seems that for Deirdre, the faceless woman stands for the real reason behind her fears, a shadow that always erects in the deep darkness of her psyche. However, she cannot configure it until Erik confesses his betrayal openly. Using the funny posture, Deirdre tries to escape tensions by mentioning the "headless woman". However, she is guided by the tension ball, which she

unconsciously drops from her bag, heading, to the bathroom, a place that has always been an escape space for the family members.

Drowning in darkness could not only stand for tension because the family's talk and joy continued on the other side of the scene. The girls become more open to their mother and Erik to Richards. Erik, for the first time in the play, tries to scrutinize his own fears, commenting on the shadowy image of the woman in his dreams. When Richard relates the grass in Brigid's dream to the grass in his backyard, Erik relates the shadowy character of the 'faceless woman,' to a tunnel that she tries to drag him into, causing him to be petrified and paralyzed. Richards, who had a psychology course, explains that the real residence of tunnels is within man's psyche:

> Tunnels are—in my class we got this list of primitive settings?... tunnels and caves, forests, the sea… stuff so a part of us it's … you know, 200,000 years ago… someone might've closed their eyes and… seen a similar kind of [image]… (Karam 2016: 90).

Richard's idea of the place to be "so part of us," and that this is a universal phenomenon shared for ages suggests that Erik is not alone in this nightmare. The tunnel is an example of an archetype in the collective unconscious of the people. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and psychologist, in his Dreams, Memories, Reflections, first published in 1961, asserts that

> My dream thus constituted a kind of structural diagram of the human psyche; it postulated something of an altogether impersonal nature underlying that psyche. It 'clicked,' as the English have it – and the dream became for me a guiding image … It was my first inkling of a collective a priori beneath the personal psyche (Jung 1963: 143).

Jung was the first to devise an architectural design of dreams as housing personal anxiety shared by the collective unconscious. He denotes that archetypes are known as places, signs, or symbols that appear in our dreams and are shared by other people over ages. Place, in short, articulates the collective feelings and thoughts of humanity. Furthermore, on the personal layer, the German philosopher Thomas Metzinger (1952), authoring Tunnel of the Ego: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self, advocates the idea that the mind designs a spatial image, like the tunnel, within which one reduces the way one conceives himself. Thus, space becomes a medium to trace one's ego lest it grows shadowy, it encompasses oneself within a spatial dimension (Metzinger 2010: 21). In the scene when Erik sees himself driven into a tunnel might be interpreted, according to Metzinger, as a

revelation of Erik's ego, which he has reduced into the hidden realm of his mind a long time ago.

When Richard tries to analyze Erik's dream of the faceless woman dragging him into a tunnel, he triggers Erik's anxiety about hiding his betrayal. Richard suggests later that this tunnel "can just be stuff hidden from yourself? So passing through one… [I dunno] could be… a favorable omen…? (Karam 2016:90). Richard follows Metzinger's method to analyze Erik's fear, which is emphasized later when the conversation is immediately followed by "CLANK of pre-war pipes" (Karam 2016: 99) which announces Erik's anxiety. At the close of the play, Erik explains to Aimee who the faceless woman is; she represents his fear of losing Aimee. The melting face he sees in his nightmare, which prevents him from sleeping, is only a reflection of his fear. As darkness overwhelms the place, Erik's memory flashes:

> In the dim light, ERIK SEES AIMEE IN SHADOW, FEATURELESS…. When we were gone, this--…fireman was holding a body with your suit on?... but a coata ash melted onto her? like she got turned into a statue like… there was gray in her eyes and mouth even it was … like her whole… (a discovery) … face was gone (Karam 2016: 120).

The phantom of the faceless woman stands for the blend of collective and personal fears. The tension which he experiences is a mixture of his care and resentment. He does care about his family, yet he could cheat on his wife. In his talk with his daughters, when making fun of their mother's email, he insists on showing respect for her care and worries about them. Both parents are caring and quite thankful for their family and try to remain solid.

When the family starts reading Momo's email, the solid moments of joy and love around the table successively grow, accompanied by the family's shadows on the staircase. But these moments are coming to an end, when, at the time of leaving, Erik confesses his guilt of cheating on Dierdre. This cheating has caused him to lose Dierdre's trust and led him to be fired from school, thence, another financial disaster for the family. Brigid's concern about her mother causes a state of anxiety that makes her unable to tolerate any other 'THUD' from the upstairs apartment of the old Chinese lady. The sound effects of the upstairs thud and Momo's growing mumbling continue to beat, orchestrating the family's increasing inescapable tension. Momo, highly agitated by the tense atmosphere, appears as if some spirit possesses her, which anticipates the impossibility of remedy, mumbling loudly, "nevery where do we go back… do we never go hole you hole do we nairywhere… nevery black hole you do we did this do we back… (fixed to Erik) Go hole. Go hole! Go hole!!" (Karam 2016: 108). The situation regains in the audience's minds

the sight of the sky falling into the hole at the bottom of the Manhattan buildings, by which the play begins. The screams Momo produces overwhelm all the empty apartment places, corridors, and forgotten corners. The soundscape is highlighted by the different sounds from everywhere inside and outside the city. The lights of Christmas grow shadowy, revealing the characters shrinking and disappearing against the city's enormity.

The disappointment and frustration the family witness due to the revelation of Erik's betrayal postulates the failure of the Thanksgiving dinner to regain familial solidarity. The apartment drowns into an epic dark. Left behind, alone in the apartment, Erik is haunted by the shadow of the woman revealing itself in the darkness to be Brigid's coat. Sounds grow louder and more terrifying in Erik's ears. Lights and sounds grow tense and persistent, echoing themselves as if they take hold of the apartment. Turning into a tunnel-like space, the hallway seems to Erik narrower and longer than it used to be. Like in horror films, the empty apartment's props, void of any sense of architecture, evolve into the real inhabitants of empty places, substituting the humans who once tread within. The door, which Erik tried more than once to lose at his departure, "slowly cracks shut", leading the whole scene into a "deep, true dark" (Karam 2016: 117). The characters have been objectified and left as dwarfed humans compared to the swallowing huge city.

3. Conclusion

In The Humans, Karam succeeds in dramatizing human fears through man's relation to the space he resides in. The play deals with spaces as a gigantic, monstrous living entity that affects the lives and psyches of people. Place and its constituents help exorcise the characters' hidden fears and tensions via means of soundscapes and lighting. The different types of fears are focused on when the apartment props act as mirror-like objects reflecting the insides of the family members. The parents, having gone under the influence of poverty and the fearful events of 9/11, are drawn by the dim atmosphere into the dark spheres of their psyche. The smaller space of the duplex in Manhattan is tried by the younger sister of the Blake family to house her family reunion on a Thanksgiving dinner. However, it is proved that the reunion has turned into a broken relationship due to the inner fears and conflicts of the family members. The play employs the apartment to posture the haunting atmosphere that intensifies these conflicts. The emptiness of the apartment provided by the disturbing thuds from upstairs and the cracking sound of the staircase whenever anyone treads its steps, let alone the lack of natural light, all contribute to reflecting the darker and irritated psyches of the apartment's dwellers. This vacant place also postulates an atmosphere overwhelmed by haunting spirits and

shadows, suggesting the extent to which the people's lives have grown into shadowy and unidentifiable spheres.

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