

Iconicity in Language and Literature 11

Creative Dynamics

Diagrammatic
strategies in narrative

Christina Ljungberg

John Benjamins Publishing Company

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Creative Dynamics

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Volume 11

Creative Dynamics. Diagrammatic strategies in narrative
by Christina Ljungberg

Preface

For this book I am indebted to many friends and colleagues who have all contributed in one way or another. Thanks are due to Winfried Nöth whose own research in the field has provided me with exceptional tools and whose feedback and criticism have always been both stimulating and helpful. Thanks also to Frederik Stjernfelt whose suggestion to me to give a talk on maps in fiction opened up an exciting new field of research and Franco Moretti for expressing his enthusiasm for my undertaking. Elisabeth Bronfen gave me excellent advice on how to think through my project and Deborah Madsen supplied me with generous and perspicacious feedback. I am also grateful for Vincent Colapietro's astute and encouraging comments. Sybille Krämer's insightful research on how we think with diagrams and the relationship between space, inscription and knowledge has proved most fruitful. For critical readings and responses on preliminary papers, I wish to thank Dines Johansen, Harri Veivo, and Barbara Straumann. To my family, Walter, Nicholas and Jessica I owe thanks for their understanding and great support. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank John White for being a wonderful reader whose comments on the manuscript in its entirety have been of invaluable help.

Zurich, May 2012
C. L.

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Introduction

What do we see when we read? What do we read into a picture – and what do we read out of a text? Viewing an image is to some extent always a process of interpretation, of making sense out of what is visually displayed to us. Such viewing could therefore be said to be an instance of reading. In turn, reading words on a page or other surface depends, on various levels, of responding perceptually – and indeed perceptively – to what is presented through these symbols.

How do images and text function *together* in fiction? What visual strategies do writers use to make readers *see* the fictional world presented in the text? These fictional narratives often turn around a visual artefact such as a photograph or a map which they allude to, concern or include, not only as actual photographs, maps or charts inserted into the text but also as carefully described in it, sometimes even presenting the key to the narrative's or story's concern or mirroring the structure of the text and/or plot. What I would like to do here is explore what such an interaction generates. I would like to call my undertaking diagramming or mapping, and tie this exploration to two concepts, *thinking cartographically* and *thinking photographically* which are both closely connected with *thinking diagrammatically* and *reading diagrammatically*, in order to see what this generates in fictional texts – in the sense of writing and reading, as well as that of production and reception.

Literature is related, in complex and often far from evident ways, to both visual arts such as painting and visual practices such as cartography and photography. This may well stem from our cognitive make-up which enables us to visualize our environment and which is tied to our movement in it, both mentally and physically. In *The Invention of Solitude*, Paul Auster (1982: 122) equates the wanderings of his mind and walking through a city, according urban movement epistemological importance:

...just as one step will inevitably lead to the next step so that one thought inevitably follows from the previous thoughts ... and in this way, if we were to try to make an image of this process in our minds a network of paths begins to be drawn, as in the image of the human bloodstream (heart, arteries, veins, capillaries), or as in the image of a map (of city streets, for example, preferably a large city, or even of roads, as in the gas station maps of roads that stretch, bisect and meander across a continent), so that what we are really doing when we walk

through the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken.
(Auster 1982: 122)

Movement and thought are inseparable, which explains our need to be able to orient ourselves in our immediate geographical environment or in our mental imaginary space to know where we are and where we have been in order to know where to go.¹ Physical movement involves other forms of symbolic performance: these are themselves and, moreover, generate various forms of utterance, written, oral, or gestural. This process presupposes a physical space in which such performances and movements take place; it also presupposes a vast array of everyday practices in which these utterances are articulated, that is, an environment with which to interact. That may well account for the human need to make diagrams and maps of our environment, and to place ourselves and our actions in relationship to it – as well to place those of others, which is after all what writers do.

This necessity can be discerned by a careful examination of literary texts in which maps and charts, photographs and sketches are elements of the plot. In these cases, the relationship between visual and verbal representations is not anything extraneous or incidental to the literary texts themselves. When an individual constructs and uses a map, or includes a photograph that carries information deviating from or influencing the plot, the question of what a character or the author is doing needs to be addressed. This question concerns what is commonly called (since J. L. Austin 2003/1962) the *performative* dimension of human discourse. The concept of the performative is that dimension of discourse which generates new ‘realities’. Performative utterances are neither true nor false since the reality to which they refer is only created by their being uttered. For example, a judge who condemns a murderer to a penalty of prison utters neither a true nor a false statement; he or she creates the reality of the consequences of this condemnation by uttering the judgment under certain necessary and appropriate circumstances. Likewise, authors of works of literature, a film or a film adaptation of a literary work may be said to create performatively. Whatever they present (i.e., perform) as real is a reality created by their very presentation. In literary analysis, critical attention to the performative dimension of human discourse, from the author’s narrative performance to the characters’ discursive performance, is accordingly necessary. The interplay between verbal and nonverbal performance extends far beyond literature, being discernible throughout culture – as, indeed, the study of literature cannot be separated from that of culture.

1. See for this topic studies on “mental rotation” in cognitive psychology, e.g., Shepherd and Metzler 1971; M. A. Jonson 1990; Peter Yule 1997.

The following chapters focus on the performative interaction between verbal and visual diagrams in literature and culture. How does this interplay function and what does it effect – and affect? What difference does the insertion of a photograph or a map into a text make? A text may well lend itself to various interpretations and understandings when it is carefully read over and over again. It is, however, seemingly restricted by its linear structure and temporal sequence even though it occupies space on the page and the reading *process* itself involves a constant movement backwards and forwards in order to construct the textual world. Cartographic and photographic representations transform the three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional, non-linear and non-sequential one. Reading maps and photographs is a nonlinear process, as is navigating on the internet. The insertion of spatial diagrams into the verbal text produces a creative interplay between the verbal and the visual narrative, which is generated by the juxtaposition of the two media. Shifting between them, attentive readers are forced not only to reflect on the various strategies of representation but also to apply different interpretive tactics of creating new mental spaces in which they can orient themselves.

By exploring the diagrammatic use of major forms of inscription – photography ('lightwriting'), cartography ('map writing'), visual images and verbal spatial configurations in literary narratives – this book traces the move towards culture as performance and performativity as a strategy to embrace the procedural, the medial and the material in literature. Traditionally, literary and cultural studies have privileged more static forms of representation. However, with the postmodern debate about the cleft between 'reality' and its representation an interest in the performativity of cultural acts has emerged, which instead redirects attention to issues of materiality and mediality (cf. Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1994). This shift of focus addresses matters of spatiality such as borderlands and interfaces; it explores how cultures create and transgress boundaries between outside and inside, between subject and object, between reality and virtuality, and between humans and technology. Despite the rhetoric in cultural studies about increasing virtualization and things becoming immaterial (cf. Baudrillard 1994; Lyotard 1984; for an overview, see also Nöth 2003b), concrete spatiality has at the same time been rehabilitated by the recent preoccupation with the ubiquity of diagrams and maps in present-day culture. However, while literary and cultural studies have increasingly employed maps and mapping as metaphors for the exploration of cultural concepts constituting the cultural imaginary, it is interesting to note the sparse contributions concerning the *function* of such spatial representations as maps and photographs in narrative, despite their ubiquity both as media and as objects of discourse. Nor has much attention been paid to what a diagram, as a mental image of relations, not only of loci in space but also of mental loci (words, concepts, terms, cf. Nöth in press), actually is and how it functions in this context.

The following chartings therefore concern both map making and map reading in literary texts, including the deployment of various media for this undertaking. How are mental and physical spaces created and manipulated? This question becomes particularly urgent in view of the rapidly proliferating technosocial space which constantly produces a need for new strategies. My own investigation primarily concerns the space generated when different media interact, and the visual and spatial strategies a writer uses to create dynamism and presence in order to bring to the fore contemporary existential concerns and problematics. On the one hand, it focuses on how diagrams work within various media such as texts, maps, and photographs to create presence and effect, which is an area that has not been sufficiently explored so far. On the other hand, mapping is used as a methodology to investigate how the insertion of diagrammatic figurations and of diagrams such as photographs and maps in narrative generates a dynamic interplay that makes these texts procedural and performative, by figuring, visualizing and conceptualizing new intellectual topographies of space.

The key notion here is the diagram. A diagram is an abstract image of relations. 'Image' means that the relations it represents are analogous to those of the object represented by it. Icons and diagrams, according to Charles Sanders Peirce, are phenomena of Peirce's category of "Firstness", which means that they represent relations by means of qualities which they have in their own form, e.g., the traffic sign for a bifurcating road which shows a line which bifurcates itself. Owing to the similarity between the diagram and whatever it represents, diagrammatic icons involve potentiality and possibility. This characterization of the diagram opens up fruitful fields of investigation into the workings of communication and interpretation, because it involves the way new information is generated in the form of mental images. Diagrammatic imaging is iconic, formed by an amalgamation of a person's culture, personal memory and psychology. However, as Lucia Santaella (1996:210) points out, perception must necessarily play an important part in the way in which diagrams are formed. Although experiential perception is mainly indexical – it calls our attention to something – any perceptual act also contains an iconic aspect, accounting for the fact that all perception has a schematic, and hence diagrammatic character. There must be a shared formal identity between the object and the way in which it is perceived even though the two may be entirely different, an understanding corroborated by cognitive scientists, who largely agree that we structure and map our experience of both imaginary and actual worlds in image schemas (cf. Johnson 1989; Fauconnier 1997; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

Diagrams form the second subcategory among Peirce's three types of icons, namely images, diagrams and metaphors. Whereas an image shares significant qualities with its object by itself and a metaphor evinces a relation of similarity mediated by a third sign (the classical *tertium comparationis*), a diagram is an

abstract representation of relations. Put differently, as a graphic register of correspondence between two mental spaces, a diagram is a spatial figuration that represents its object in a form that is reduced to the relation which shows it to be similar to its object. Therefore, it has a great visual potential to create a comprehensible overview – like the way in which a map represents a geographical area, a floor plan the layout of a house or a table of contents the overall plan of a written work – which makes it highly useful for communicating and understanding complex data. It is this relational quality that gives diagrams a sense of actuality and endows them with the ability or even claim to represent ‘reality’ which is today more or less discounted in other forms of representation. Photography, for instance, was long considered ‘authentic’, which gave it the status of a factual document (see, e.g., Armstrong 1996; Nöth 2003a; Gronert 2004; Mitchell 2005). But although its truth claim has long since been undermined and (possibly) put to rest by the advent of digital photography, it is still there and being used abundantly to investigate how ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are generated and the various ways they are performed. Maps, too, were historically regarded as factual documents in the fictional travel narratives that appeared in early modern times such as Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), but also used as tools to show that relations between two spaces can be manipulated and altered.

Diagrams are spatial embodiments of knowledge with a peculiar potential to stimulate new cognitive engagements. This lies in their capacity to abstract and to generalize, which makes them ideal not only for activities such as solving problems, hypothesizing or just tracing imaginary journeys on a map – or in the mind.² Given that these activities all have to do with projection and imagination, with disruptions and efficacies, they are also intimately connected with the way we produce and process texts. Hence, one of my core claims is that the cognitive processes generated by the use of diagrams not only serve to guide reader/viewer response but also – and to a much greater extent – serve to open up the play of signifiers. My interest in these intermedial interfaces is therefore less directed at finished products and much more at the dynamic interplay generated by the juxtaposition, of “visual culture” and “print culture”, in these texts. In other words, the focus is on the processes involving diagrammatic thought.

2. To C. S. Peirce, even in such a banal situation as when a person makes up his mind about what he actually wants, he makes an imaginary “sort of skeleton diagram, or outline sketch, of himself, considers what modification the hypothetical state of things would require to be made in that picture, and then examines it, and then *observes* what he has examined” (CP 2. 227). In addition, the diagram is “particularly useful, because it suppresses a quantity of details, and so allows the mind more easily to think of its important features” (CP 2. 282).

That is why this study's focus is on the maps and photographs that authors themselves have drawn and placed in their works, as well as explicitly diagrammatic verbal mapping of their (fictional) environment. Despite an increasing body of critical literature on the function of space in literature, few have focused on precisely *how* cartographic representation creates meaning in fictional texts.³ My project therefore differs from the large (and steadily growing) number of works on literary maps that seem to have mostly looked at maps as decoration or used them for their explorations as to how literature places itself in 'real', geographical areas, often provided with an impressive collection of literary, historical and geographical data. Among these are, e.g., J. G. Bartholomew's *Literary and Historical Atlas of Europe* (1910), Michael Hardwick's *Literary Atlas and Gazetteer of the British Isles* 1973, David Daiches' *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles* (1979), J. Hillis Miller's 1995 book *Topographies* (which focuses on the function of topographical descriptions) and Malcolm Bradbury's magnificent *Atlas of Literature* (1996). A particular postcolonial perspective on literary maps is taken by Graham Huggan (1994) whose *Territorial Disputes* charts the ideological perspectives of geography and literary concepts in Canadian and Australian fiction and discusses mapping as a colonizing activity. Another approach is taken by Albert Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi who explore 1200 fictional realms in their lavishly illustrated *Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (2000) by (re)drawing fictional maps. So does Werner Nell's recent *Atlas der fiktiven Orte* (2012) which also provides each map with a 'travel guide' to each imaginary location describing its 'geographical' position, size, population, places to visit etc. Nell, a sociologist, motivates his undertaking with the comment that the maps in his book reflect the landscape of our imagination. He makes the interesting observation that if you google "fictive places", you will find that the search command is linked to the World Wide Web workspace called *Weltenbastler* (Worldtinkerer, my translation), which is translated as "those designers and programmers who construct backdrops and town plans, cityscapes and cave formations for computer games" as the places in which the game player moves (Nett 2012: 8, my translation).⁴

My approach also differs from the very interesting one offered by Franco Moretti in his *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (1997), in which he makes a brilliant display of the usefulness of diagrams for revealing hidden connections and unsuspected contexts in these novels. Instead of working, as I am, with the

3. One notable exception is Tom Conley's (1996) fine study on cartographic writing in early modern France, which traces how, as maps were plotted, a new self emerged which was partly defined by the relationship of the self to space.

4. Ger. *Damit sind jene Designer und Programmierer gemeint, die für Computerspiele Kulissen und Baupläne, Stadtlandschaften und Höhlengebilde bauen.*

existing maps in novels, Moretti draws his own diagrams. As he explains, his methodology is to

select a textual feature (here, beginning and endings), find the data, put them on paper – and then you look at the map. In the hope that the visual construct will be more than the sum of its parts: that it will show a shape, a pattern that may *add* something to the information that went into making it. (Moretti 1997: 13)

Demonstrating that the pattern this yields, in this case “Jane Austen’s Britain” (Figure 1), clearly shows where the power centres are located – and where Austen’s readership is gathered, which is southern England – Moretti states that Austen’s literary nation contains

[n]o Ireland, no Scotland; no Wales, no Cornwall ...only England: a much smaller space than the United Kingdom as a whole. And not even all of England: Lancashire, the North, the industrial revolution – all missing. Instead we have the much older England celebrated by the ‘estate poems’ of topographical poetry: hills, parks, country houses... It’s a first instance of what literary geography may tell us: two things at once: what *could* be in a novel – and what actually is there. (Moretti 1997: 13)



Figure 1. Jane Austen’s Britain (Moretti 1997: 12). With kind permission of the author.

It is instructive that Moretti's maps were criticized for not being maps but diagrams. He agrees with his critics, pointing out in his later book, *Graphs, Maps and Trees* (2005: 54), these diagrams "look like maps because they have been superimposed on a cartographic plane but that their true nature emerges unmistakably from the way I analyze them, which disregards the specificity of the various locations, to focus almost entirely on their mutual relations". What is interesting here is how Moretti's example distinctly shows the diagram's or map's superiority in communicating seemingly clearly and transparently the complex political, social and cultural circumstances in which Austen's novels were written. This concurs precisely with the criticism often levelled against cartography itself to only show selective features in particular relationships, which is one of the key points in this book.

Moretti's ideas of literary geographical space have been taken up by Barbara Piatti who has developed a cartographic atlas both as a book, *Die Geographie der Literature* (2008) (Figure 2) and as an ongoing project with the ETH Zurich, Switzerland. The aim of her innovative project, A European Literary Atlas, is to create a spatially structured history of European literature. Piatti investigates the geographical space of where literature happens and looks at what kind of space attracts literature, how frequent a certain geographical area appears in literature and why, as well as using a sophisticated soft-ware system to differentiate between the various kinds of literary spaces. Piatti's attention is therefore not directed towards the diagrammatic function of maps in narratives per se but towards the various landscapes and their function in the narrative.

My book starts by exploring mapping practices in various forms and contexts. What is a map and how does it function? What is the difference between a map and diagram, and how can we define them? Departing from the map which kicks off the adventure in James Dickey's novel *Deliverance* (1970), I continue to investigate the relationship between cartographic signs and verbal language, and the strategies used to locate geographical features on maps and in texts. This chapter also looks at the role of mapping throughout the ages, and how the concept of a map has changed from the medieval *mappae mundi* to today's scientifically calculated maps. It goes on to discuss cognitive views of maps as "material anchors" and true "artefacts" (Hutchins (2005: 1574) for complex cognitive processes that humans have used since time immemorial and how the concept of maps is changing with the introduction of satellite and other virtual maps.

Chapter 2, "Cartographic Writing", deals with historical maps in texts and their history. It explores how these maps are semanticized and historically different, and how history and discourse mirror each other. From very early on,



Figure 2. *Tell-Topographie* mapped onto a map of central Switzerland (Piatti 2008, Karte 13). With kind permission of the author.

writers have seemingly known how to exploit the tension between discourse and space in a highly sophisticated fashion. This becomes evident in their verbal and visual descriptions of space and their use of maps in canonical works such as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Mlle de Scudéry's *Map of Tenderness* in her novel *Clélie*, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The remarkable popularity of maps in fictional works suggests that maps had multiple uses as strategies for avoiding censorship, voicing divergent opinions, commenting on contemporary mores or issues of subjectivity. It shows the effectiveness the inclusion of maps into fictional works achieved as these works exemplarily exploit