

Title for Short Paper: Projecting Places in Narratives and Creating Literary Cartography through Affective Enactment

Kai Tan, M.A.

RWTH Aachen University, Germany

Abstract:

According to Piatti, projected places emerge in narratives when characters imagine actual and/or imaginary places based on their dreams, desires and memories (“Dreams” 179). Madame Bovary, for instance, longs for Paris while living in Normandy, and Amir in *The Kite Runner* recalls the Kabul of his youth while residing in the San Jose as an adult. Differing from settings and sites where action occurs, projected places “add extra layers of meaning to the geography of a narrated world.” Coined by Piatti et al., projected places are “part of a genuine geography of fiction and hence subject to the currently dynamically developing field of literary geography and literary cartography” (Piatti, “Dreams” 179). By connecting projected places and mental images, a newly-emerging map expands the fictional geography of the narrative (180). Moreover, places that are projected at various points of the narrative create “an unusual density and radiance of place description,” and the shifts between the setting and projected places continually produce “tensions and the dynamics of [the] narrated worlds” that contribute to the plot development (181).

While Piatti’s projected places focus on characters’ imaginaries, this paper uses the concept to explain readers’ sense-making of narrative space and their imagination of other places. Just as characters become “mentally displaced to another location by . . . a trigger” (181), readers similarly construe spatial projections at different junctures of the narrative. Referring to second-generation cognitive approaches to narratives by scholars including Caracciolo and Kukkonen, this paper explains how embodied readers comprehend narrative space through experientiality, affective enactment, as well as the cognitive feedback loop that account for readers’ memories, past actions, experiences with cultural artefacts, and their biological condition and/or physiological limitations.

To study readers’ projected places and the resulting literary cartography, this paper presents preliminary findings from the first of a two-part online qualitative survey conducted in December 2019 and January 2020 on readers’ responses to spatial descriptions in literary works. The participants comprising my students from a

seminar on contemporary British writings, had to read (amongst other works) the novels Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002) prior to taking the first survey. They were informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the submissions would be anonymous. At the time of the survey, the students had not delved into discussions related to the contents or the themes related to the texts. Given the plenteous discussions (especially with the spatial turn) in fields such as literary studies, urban planning, architecture and geography about the impact of urban space on humans and societal issues, the stimuli selected from the survey included four passages that foreground spatial experiences [in particular psychogeographical literary moments or PLMs]. In addition, two passages that foregrounded narrated space [one each from Smith's 2016 work *Swing Time* and Will Wiles's first novel, *Care of Wooden Floors* (2012)], which the students had never read before, were included as distracting pieces.

To avoid a deterministic pattern in the responses, the participants were separated into three groups and each group receive a set of survey containing the excerpts in a specific sequence. For this early study of readers' responses to spatial descriptions in literary works, the intention was to collect as many responses as possible in order to formulate possible themes and codes, or dimensions and items for a future quantitative scale. The questions were hence open-ended and encouraged the participants to elaborate on their answers. For the excerpts taken from *NW* and *INS*, the questions also made references to themes or larger ideas presented in the novel. Furthermore, the participants were asked to provide a *Goodreads* type of book review for the novels at the end of the survey.

In response to the passages, the participants recalled affective and enactive responses to triggers (including sights, sounds, and movements) from past experiences in other places. Such findings indicate readers' reliance on their experiential traces to imagine projected places that helped them to discern the foregrounded spatial experiences in the psychogeographical passages. Since "sequences of action can also be linked within the frame of projected places" (Piatti, "Dreams" 185), the participants' plot predictions, which are continually reassessed due to the feedback loop, are modified by the projected places and possible actions in these virtual sites. Moreover, projected places as well as associated affective and phenomenological experiences of such places could be observed through the participants' expressions

that reflect affective enactment in the narrative space. Akin to Soja's "real-and-imagined" space (or thirdspace) and Lefebvre's "lived space", projected places thus account for the dialectic process between the actual and the personal, and the ensuing subjective invention of other places. Examples of the participants' responses to *NW* and *INS* will be presented to illustrate their projection of places based on affective enactment.

Using the collected list of projected places, possible actions as well as affective responses, it would be meaningful to create "entire cultural-historical overviews of projected places at a given time" (Piatti 186). As noted by Piatti, such mapping is a means to "searching explicitly for such journeys of the mind," which can, in turn, produce "a stunning collective spatial archive." By observing both frequently projected places as well as outliers, light could be shed on the affective impact of real-life urban spaces on readers (and people in general) with diverse experiential backgrounds. While such methods as Jameson's "cognitive mapping" and Mitchell's "cartographic strategies" are said to neglect the importance of subjective experiences (Prieto 60), the approach proposed in this paper acknowledges individual enactive and affective responses and recognises the influence of readers' personal experiential traces on their peculiar construing of projected places. In consonance with the focus of the spatial turn on subject-centred spatial encounters, the resulting literary cartography from such research uncovers multifaceted phenomenological experiences of places. Furthermore, by unveiling connections amongst real, written, and projected places, it would be possible to observe the consequences of our experiences with urban space and subsequently raise meaningful questions about the effects of real-world urban designs on humans' embodied cognition.

Sources

Caracciolo, Marco. *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*. Walter De Gruyter, 2014.

Colombetti, Giovanna. *The Feeling Body. Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*. MIT Press, 2014.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 1991.

- Debord, Guy. *Theory of the Dérive*. UbuWeb Papers, www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/derivededebord.pdf.
- . "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography." *Les Lèvres Nues*, #6, 1955. Nothingness.org, library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/2.
- Kukkonen, Karin. *4E Cognition and Eighteenth-Century Fiction: How the Novel Found its Feet*. Oxford UP, 2019.
- . *Probability Designs: Literature and Predictive Processing*. Oxford UP, 2020.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. 1974. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Blackwell, 1991.
- Löffler, Catharina. *Walking in the City. Urban Experience and Literary Psychogeography in Eighteenth-Century London*. J.B. Metzler, 2017.
- McGregor, Jon. *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. Bloomsbury, 2002.
- Mitchell, Peta. "Literary Geography and The Digital: The Emergence of Neogeography." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 85-95.
- Piatti, Barbara. "Dreams, Memories, Longings. The Dimension of Projected Places in Fiction." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 179-186.
- Piatti, Barbara, et al. "CO-237 A Literary Atlas of Europe—Analysing the Geography of Fiction with an Interaction Mapping and Visualisation System." *Semantic Scholar*, 2011, www.semanticscholar.org/paper/CO-237-A-LITERARY-ATLAS-OF-EUROPE-ANALYSING-THE-OF-Piatti-Reuschel/5984f083e7decc45be017d3a4b2da46ce84379a7.
- Prieto, Eric. "Phenomenology, Place, and the Spatial Turn." *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, edited by Robert T. Tally Jr., Routledge, 2017, pp. 60-69.
- Smith, Zadie. *NW*. Hamish Hamilton, 2012.
- . *Swing Time*. Penguin, 2016.
- Soja, Edward. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.
- Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. MIT, 2017.
- Wiles, Will. *The Care of Wooden Floors*. Harper Press, 2012.