David Rodriguez*

Description in space: Geography and narrative form

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Abstract: Description and experience of the form of landscape are the core of geographical methodology and are explicitly theorized in humanist geography, particularly by Edward Relph. This essay outlines how his ideas about "seeing, thinking, and describing" – particularly the primacy of description – are relevant to a reformation for how narratologists handle the relationship between fiction and environment. Though the narratologist deals with reading and analyzing descriptions rather than producing descriptions as the geographer does, the phenomenological relationship between self, environment, and description of the latter can curiously expand what we normally think of as the reader-text dyad in the former. This new perspective is put into practice by studying three examples from American novels that offer descriptions of the environment from above.

Keywords: Description, spatiality, geography, poetics, environment, American literature

Why take the trouble to represent what we already possess – what we now see with our eyes and now feel under our feet? Not only does representing landscape in paintings and photographs seem cognitively greedy (as if such representation were more important or more satisfying than experiential immersion), but it also seems to be unnecessary. What need is there to represent a landscape vista that is enticing or entrancing in itself, engaging us fully? Does not the vast implacable river below me speak for itself? Is this not enough already? Why move to representation when the experience of landscape is dense enough, and frequently pleasing enough, in its own way? Why seek *other* ways, particularly representational ones that appear to signify a secondary status and that only complicate matters further? Why re-present what is already presented so effectively and thoroughly in ordinary direct experience?

Casey 2002: xiii

Buried in a note in Gerald Prince's recent commentary in *PMLA* is the creative plea for literary critics to turn to "narrative in space" rather than "space in narrative." This is my starting point, particularly his suggestion that this implies a

^{*}Corresponding author: David Rodriguez, Stony Brook University, English Department, Stony Brook, E-Mail: david.m.rodriguez@stonybrook.edu

more "expansive" field of study (Prince 2016: 1494). I agree: "space in narrative" replicates a counterintuitive sense that somehow a single narrative – or narrative. in theory - can enclose whatever "space" is within its identifiable and determinate structure. Narrative in space, however, resonates more with everyday experiences of encountering and interacting with narrative while navigating the environment in daily life.

But a problem emerges that seems to precede thinking about *narrative* in space: what about description? This call to invert our habits as narratologists may imply another counterintuitive enclosure, as description of and in space is subordinated to narrative. Geography, on the other hand, foregrounds description, with a productively broad understanding of the term. In this essay, I will look at description in narratology alongside an introduction to the function of description in humanist geography, and then present how renewed attention to description in narratology can help apply insights from geography to studying the form of literary description as well as the environment. I will pace this study of narrative in space through descriptive images from O Pioneers! by Willa Cather (1913), The Sheltering Sky by Paul Bowles (1949), and City of Glass by Paul Auster (1985).

1 Description in narratology

An answer to the questions from my epigraph comes with Edward S. Casey's splitting of "re-presentation." He supplements the static, mimetic suggestions of representation with the idea that aesthetic engagements with the environment create effects of "re-implacement," where a place is re-formed as it appears with the aesthetic object (Casey 2002: 30). This re-implacement not only sets a place down into a new context, but it stages representation itself, making representation of representation a primary aesthetic experience:

just as the object of description thereby becomes a represented object, so the activity of description sets this object over against us within a nexus of pictorial horizons. The worldas-picture is a world that has become a totality of objects that solicit us to remake them which is to say, to represent them in their very representedness – by our own descriptive and depictive actions. (Casey 2002: 236)

While Casey refers to pictures – maps and landscape painting – something similar applies to literary images when it comes to the act of describing the environment. Casey addresses literary engagements with landscape in his epilogue, noting that, in prose fiction, "at least a tacit reference to landscape [...] holds narrated events together, furnishing for them a common matrix of interconnected place" (Casey

2002: 274). As I argue with the geographical (at least Relph's) definition of description, these concepts also apply to literary description, with some sensitivity to the idea that we are dealing with imagination and not with perception when we turn from pictorial or figurative art to language and poetic images.

A "re-implacement" from actual and perceptual experience into fictional and imaginal experience is another interpretation of what Prince's narrative in space could mean. This suggests an extension of Casey's claim: the manifest form of any narrative is afforded by the environment in which it is in the process of reimplacing, an experience the reader follows as he or she encounters the form of environment re-presented in literary description. Thus, narrative in space implies that, in a sense, narrative form is dependent on the affordances of the spatial form of landscape. This landscape, of course, varies, which is why the case studies to follow all are examples of that most popular of vantages, the view from above.² Through following the form of this familiar landscape, we can follow the possibilities of how narrative can exist in this space.

Prior work, though, has productively opened the door for this biocentric point of departure. The narratological norm is to refer to perceptual, and so anthropocentric, models of spatial representation in discourse. For David Herman (2002: 293–299), it is a mental model of the projected storyworld; for Monika Fludernik (2014; 2016), it is dependent on psycholinguistic capabilities of description. But recently a breach of ecocriticism by narrative theory has suggested the possibilities of a biocentric approach to narrative in space, triangulated by postcolonial studies (James 2015), cognitive approaches (von Messner 2017), and New Materialism (Marcussen 2017). Despite this recent work, the concurrent tide of nonanthropocentric approaches to literary criticism across fields has not entered narratological currency. A "geographical narratology," for me, is directly akin to this interest in what narratology can contribute to ecocriticism, and vice versa.

One reason for the absence of this general turn toward the nonhuman in narratology (Herman 2018 excepted), particularly on a methodological level, is

¹ This definition of "narrative in space" asserts that the form of the environment affords the eventual aesthetic forms given in descriptions embedded in narrative texts, as opposed to Ryan et al.'s (2016: ch 6-7) study of how actual street names or landscapes are narrativized in ways not integrated into aesthetic experience.

² While this perspective has a strong background in cultural theory in texts such as *Imperial Eyes* by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and Apollo's Eye by Denis Cosgrove (2002), the aerial view in narratology has been collapsed either into classical schematizations of heterodiegetic narrators "above" the storyworld or psycholinguistic constructions of various types of "tour" gazes of static spaces. Recent work in art history by Jason Weems in Barnstorming the Prairies (2015) and cultural studies by Caren Kaplan in Aerial Aftermaths (2018) suggest that aerial images play a much richer role in aesthetic and fictional contexts than narratology presently accounts for.

part of the legacy of subordinating description, as a text-type, to narrative discourse. This is, of course, somewhat of a false dilemma, as narratology is the study of narrative, after all. But the specificity of the function of description seems to have been collateral damage in the development of post-classical narratology. Fludernik claims some ground for description in her analysis of oral vs. written discourse, but the way in which she constructs its potential form leaves little to be developed as it is cordoned off from narrativity proper: "Description no longer operates as that functional entity which occurs in the slot reserved for embedded orientation but becomes an extendable and separate discourse type in its own right" (1991: 59). Though this seems to privilege description as a unique form that perhaps clashes with and disrupts narrative form, it ends up minimizing description's potential in a model of the reader's behavior. This implication is not very different from previous classical models, such as Franz Stanzel's statement that the dynamics between, for example, description, dialogue, and figural consciousness representation in a text are "only meaningful when they are related to their specific function within the narrative context" (74). Like Fludernik, he does not mean to suggest erasure of description by referring to its *specific* function, but this has the effect of implying that "specific" means "certain" or easily determinable. His absurd test of a description's precision (or perspectival opacity) as equivalent to its drawability (120) suggests that his definition is primarily perceptual: defining description's form is dependent on how realistic it seems and its reception is measured with the valence of its dis/orientation.

The essential difference in an approach interested first of all in the geographical environment is that it drops the anthropocentric mandate to, as Alexander Gelley (1977) puts it, treat descriptions "as micro-narratives which need to be assimilated to a larger narrative pattern" (77). Descriptions embedded in narrative do not primarily serve to generate verisimilitude or to place the characters and the narrating figure in space, though "description" as used in narratology so often denotes the "antechamber of the inner world," as Stanzel (1984: 74) configures it. In this way, description has been recuperated by an anthropocentric bias to become "evidence" for how characters think, where they are located, what they are feeling, and what they see and know.

Contra the association of description with concrete perceptual fact, what makes description unique and distinct from narration is its indeterminate form. Philippe Hamon (1981) recognized this material power of description: "Description, as usual, appears as a threatening area [...]. [D] escription might be that place in the text where the generative power of language might show itself most clearly and as quite unmanageable" (25). This idea of the "unmanageability of description" captures its essential indeterminacy, even when put in the service of realism. Hamon (2004) additionally discusses the mimetic default for description in realism as paradoxical: "description is the point where the narrative comes to a temporary halt, while continuing to organize itself [...]: it can thus be seen that the fundamental characteristic of realist discourse is to deny, to make impossible, the narrative, any narrative" (332).

There is a cliché that description is vital, yet dispensable. This can be stated positively: description is medium-specific and has an essentially open structure, while narrative structure is transmedial and fits into recognizable forms. This is one general way to explain the critical habit of looking at *space*, usually thought of as abstract, as opposed to "place" – *in narrative* – a well-charted structure that can accommodate "new" categories. Thinking about *narrative in space*, though, does not fit into these narratological preconceptions.

One field that attempts to subvert these categories is geocriticism. The methodology follows how narratives exist in space, as part of the "multifocalization" of particular real spaces in many different texts; as Bertrand Westphal (2007) states: "By taking a geocritical perspective, we opt for a plural point of view, which is located at the crossroads of distinct representations. In this way, we contribute to the process of determining a common space, born from and touching upon different points of view." (114). Geocriticism develops a literary methodology for studying how cultural spaces are constructed, but despite its shared interest in Earth, I do not think "determining a common space" is necessarily the goal of a geographical narratology. What still comes out as undertheorized is description. Even if individual narrative form is subordinated to a larger, comparative superstructure of multiple narrative forms as they are organized by their references to "real spaces," as in geocriticism, we gloss over the impact and value of the individual, subjective experience of reading descriptions of spaces that are recognizable, or not. This, again inadvertently, foregrounds perceptual space over imaginary space, grafting the ideal of the "final product" of a geographical approach (a determinate map) onto the process (indeterminacy in the reading experience).

Let us make this concrete by looking at a descriptive "re-implacement" in Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*:

On one of the ridges of that wintry waste stood the low log house in which John Bergson was dying. The Bergson homestead was easier to find than many another, because it overlooked Norway Creek, a shallow, muddy stream that sometimes flowed, and sometimes stood still, at the bottom of a winding ravine with steep, shelving sides overgrown with brush and cottonwoods and dwarf ash. This creek gave a sort of identity to the farms that bordered upon it. Of all the bewildering things about a new country, the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening. The houses on the Divide were small and were usually tucked away in low places; you did not see them until you came directly upon them. Most of them were built of the sod itself and were only the unescapable ground in

another form. The roads were but faint tracks in the grass, and the fields were scarcely noticeable. The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings.

In eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame. It was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why. Mischance hung over it. Its Genius was unfriendly to man. The sick man was feeling this as he lay looking out of the window, after the doctor had left him, on the day following Alexandra's trip to town. There it lay outside his door, the same land, the same lead-colored miles. He knew every ridge and draw and gully between him and the horizon. To the south, his plowed fields; to the east, the sod stables, the cattle corral, the pond, – and then the grass. (Cather 7–8)

This is certainly an "unmanageable" description. Conventionally, this passage from *O Pioneers!* is an instance of zero focalization, as there is no initial perspectival seat introduced. It is the extradiegetic narrator "setting the scene," as we would conventionally see it here at the beginning of the novel. There is a strong dynamic of "high" and "low" and a sense that this image is from the perspective of a lifted vantage, anchored by the focal point of the Bergson farm. As this image unfolds in the second paragraph, it is ostensibly given a seat in Bergson's consciousness, as his thoughts are framed more clearly when he is introduced lying in bed and the capitalized "Genius" defies the non-anthropocentric description before this break "into" his mind.

A conventional interpretation is to background the initial description as "setting" or, by contrast, treat it retroactively as a bleak projection from Bergson's dying consciousness onto an unfriendly landscape, as internally focalized. An ecocritical move amidst some Cather scholars has started to resist habits of analyzing space in narrative that are constitutive of representations of setting or impressions from characters' minds. Guy Reynolds (2003) calls Cather's non-anthropocentric descriptive method "organic modernism," where she uses the environment "as an analog for novelistic form;" this is more than a simple analogy, as Reynolds claims that in Cather's fiction "landscape might even *create* form" (180).

The description before the break "into" the Bergson house is assertively negative. It presents an oscillation of what is possibly seen, what is unlikely to be seen, and what is impossible to determine as "seen." While the first part of the description establishes "seeing" – this view from above – as the dominant paradigm of understanding, visual primacy is dropped after the organizing feature – the creek – is introduced. This manifests in an identifiable shift in tone that starts with, "Of all the bewildering things..." Inserting the creek as a built form destabilizes all of the other, "human," lines on the land. The rest of the description escapes a binary between a/perspectival focalization as it emphasizes that, from

the focal point of the land, all lines on the surface are indeterminate marks, whether it be creek, road, plowed fields, or the glacial record. In the next paragraph focalization is reflexively "staged," in the sense that its normal ability to organize the material environment into realistic description fails because it accounts only for human perception and not the indeterminate form of the environment. At this point in the novel, human perspective-taking fails alongside human attempts at organizing the form of the environment into agricultural forms. A narratology tuned to this acute, literary "re-implacement" is less interested in how Bergson's "impressions" effect the description than in how this image displaces human perspective as it articulates the form of the environment.

Gaston Bachelard puts it well: "Readers 'skip the descriptions' because no one has taught them to appreciate 'literary imagination'" (1988: 179). Narratology has made the mistake of interpreting this supposed readerly habit into the structure of the literary work, assuming that it is perception and perspective-taking that is at stake, not imagination. A geographical narratology foregrounds the value of literary imagination as part of the exchange between geographical and narratological method. Because the act of describing and the experience of description are uniquely collapsed in reading, "teaching" readers how to encounter literary descriptions also has direct relevance to the reading of spaces, equally to geographers doing research or encountering the environment in daily life.

2 Description in geography

Perhaps an interdisciplinary reach toward geography can help bring description to narratology. Edward Relph identifies his process as a geographer as steps through a phenomenological relationship between himself and the environment. His work begins with "seeing, thinking, and describing," a process of "looking carefully at landscapes, allowing my thinking to respond to what I see, and then attempting to describe clearly the character of these landscapes" (1984: 212). This is less about what the geographer is *doing* than about what one *has done*. Seeing, thinking, and describing as modes of analysis cannot really be separated³ and identifying them at all means looking back at one's experience of the environment and recounting the value of memories, impressions, and notes.

While Relph confidently identifies this method and yet still hesitates at the three categories' conceptual salience, he is also defining the essential push-pull relationship between a subject and the landscape being described. In *Place and*

³ Relph is also careful to point out that these are merely "analytical categories" (1984: 212).

Placelessness, he adds a third term to a tenet of phenomenology: "it might be said that all consciousness is not merely consciousness of something, but of something in its place" (1976: 42). This is not just an expansion of intentionality to include something's abstract context; it implies that our experience of access to the world and to objects and their emplacement are intertwined. What follows is that, for the geographer, "only by a distorting act of imagination can we separate ourselves from a landscape and treat it as object" (1984: 221). The form of the environment is inseparable from the geographer who sees, thinks, and describes *with* it to locate its meaning and identify its structure.

The situation is quite different with literary "environments" accessible only through their description and subsequent imagination. While Relph implies that this "distorting act of imagination" betrays accurate description of the environment, literary images that describe the environment are, rather, a performative "distortion." As literary narrative collides with the form of environment, what results are "distorted," meaning not perceptually realistic, literary descriptions.⁴ Consider the role of one of the protagonists, Port, in *The Sheltering Sky*:

He ceased listening. They had left the town, traversed the valley, and were climbing a large, bare hill on the other side. As they swung around one of the many S-curves, he realized with a start that he was looking straight at the Turkish fortress, small and perfect as a toy at this distance, on the opposite side of the valley. Under the wall, scattered about on the yellow earth, were several tiny black tents; which one he had been in [...] he could not say, for the staircase was not visible from here. [...] Again and again the valley came into view, always a little smaller, a little farther away, a little less real. The Mercedes roared like a plane; there was no muffler on the exhaust pipe. The mountains were there ahead, the sebkha was spread out below. He turned to get a last look at the valley; the shape of each tent was still discernible, and he realized that the tents looked like the mountain peaks behind them on the horizon.

As he watched the heat-covered landscape unfold, his thoughts took an inward turn, dwelt briefly on the dream that still preoccupied him. At the end of a moment, he smiled; now he had it. [...] He wondered why it had upset him; it was a simple, classic dream. The connections were all clear in his head. Their particular meaning with regard to his own life scarcely mattered. For in order to avoid having to deal with relative values, he had long since come to deny all purpose to the phenomenon of existence – it was more expedient and comforting. He was pleased to have solved his little problem.

He looked around the countryside; they were still climbing, but they had gone over the first crest. About them now were barren, rounded hills, without details to give them scale. And on every side was the same uneven, hard line of the horizon, with the blinding white sky behind. (Bowles 57–58)

⁴ See Relph 2002 for a brief commentary on reading descriptive aesthetic images vs. describing everyday landscapes: "in practice I find that description is no more straightforward than reading" (151).

This second image offers a more concrete presentation of aerial description. It plays less on the inadequacy of human perspective-taking – the juxtaposition as clash of separated interior and exterior perspectives in the Cather passage – and instead foregrounds juxtaposition of character and environment as a confusing intermingling. Here we have a mobile perspective, definitely seated "in the mind" of Port as he rides in a car up and out of the valley in which he had just spent the night wandering, now driving towards the extended desert. Similar to how Reynolds foregrounds the agency of the environment in the construction of Cather's novels. Alexa Weik von Mossner (2013) argues that in *The Sheltering Sky* "the Sahara is in fact both a symbolic *landscape* – and thus a socially constructed realm – and a physically and geographically present agent that acts directly on the bodies, emotions, and cognitions of the protagonists" (224). I will take this further and say that the Sahara is the final agent of the novel as an aesthetic object, not just for its embedded human figures. The Sahara as an object of "seeing, thinking, and describing" in its vast extent, available in moments such as this when a character is able to see it from above, projects a certain type of thought.

The progressive lift up to an ever higher vantage affords Port's ascension into this poetic image, out of reality, and travelling "into" his dreams. An interpretation of a dream intrudes upon his act of "seeing" the valley, and so he follows the "thinking" this affords as it comes to the description of his own life. Notably, he denies narrativization of his life; he refuses to recall the past and denies ordering past events' meaning in his life. That his anti-narrative reflections occur in the midst of this aerial description is not incidental. As the car climbs and he surveys the scene below, the shrinking valley becomes "a little less real," with every turn in the road shading the survey of his life. The indeterminate landscape is a clearer image of Port's "interior" than the conventional psychoanalytic "internalization" of the environment as it helps him interpret his dreams. Bowles slides out of modernist convention as described by the majority of critics (similar to Cather's ironic biocentricism) by refusing "enclosure" to be the model for narrative. Not even the form of the journey - a kind of linear enclosure - can be used to adequately describe A Sheltering Sky, as most of the connections between places have to do with chaotic missed connections rather than the transit of events across places. I will discuss narrative form and enclosure in the next section, but here we can consider how the openness of the described landscape presents a challenge, in general, to representation. When literature is the "environment" to which the subject is oriented, Relph's model is reversed: in literary descriptions landscapes are described (already embedded in the text), thought (or read), and seen (or "seen" through the imaginary). Reversing Relph's steps to fit his phenomenological method for geography into a literary geography means considering the form of description as primary, while "thought" and "sight" follow from what each specific description affords.

3 The form of the text

In these analyses what emerges is one of the essential differences between narratology and geography. Narratology treats landscape as enclosed within narrative and pinned down by referential description, while the geographer's understanding of the landscape is open to interaction with the subject, something to be described and so involved in active re-implacement. Spatial description – "space in narrative" – as it is understood in Herman (2002), Ryan (2003), and Dennerlein (2009) is a positive mental model for the relationship between the reader and the text. For Ryan this model is a map and for Dennerlein it is a container, basically a room. These conceptual metaphors determine what follows in their arguments, the development of new concepts to be identified and applied to interpretation (such as Ryan et al.'s [2016] expansion of storyworld to "narrative universe," another container, just a larger one).

We can see critiques of conventional, egocentric models of spatiality in New Formalism, particularly in Caroline Levine's work since *Forms*, but there is surprising overlap with geographers interested in aesthetics as well:

Thinking about representations of space in generic terms is an attempt to relate the geography in the text (places, settings, landscapes) to the geography surrounding it, so to speak. This approach formulates a series of questions about the constraints of the creation of a text and their implications for its reception, suggesting that generic conventions are also relevant at both 'ends' of the literary process. [...] Reading spatiality in terms of genre is therefore a form of invitation to step outside the apparent stability and closure of the written text. (Brosseau 20)

Here Marc Brosseau is referring to how particular places are constructed across texts of the same genre, such as cities in crime novels. He notes that the experience of the reader in relation to the formal structures of the text and their represented environments is essential. Again, the primacy of Relph's "seeing, thinking, describing" subject recurs. Fecent work in New Formalism suggests the same: we should consider how cultural forms such as enclosed campuses, rhyth-

⁵ While the above quote is aimed at literary critics, Brosseau makes a similar plea directly to geographers attempting to incorporate literature into study of place and space: "We are then asking the novel to 'stick to facts' regardless of the other aspects of its content. We are denying the potential interest of fiction or of the fictitious treatment of geographical realities within an

mic labor, and networked subcultures also pervade aesthetic forms. As it pertains to "enclosure," the form most relevant to the description/narration binary discussed here. Levine notes:

To say that narratives *enclose* or *contain* social material is to use a spatial figure to describe stories. This implies that narratives hold their materials together in the same way as funerary urns, when in fact they are forms unfolding over time. The term *closure* thus elides the different affordances of narrative and spatial closure. [...] What if we understood literary texts not as unified but as inevitably plural in their forms – bringing together multiple ordering principles, both social and literary, in ways that do not and cannot repress their differences? From this perspective, could one formal element of a text ever manage to contain and control the others? (40)

I will add, which is to be expected at this point, that we can also consider the ordering principles of landscape as part of this plurality of forms. Description of the environment, thus, is not another form "enclosed" within unified narrative, but an opening where the imaginary valence of a real environment is accessed by the reader.

To illustrate, we can see how familiar postmodern forms in *City of Glass* collapse spatial and descriptive levels through metalepsis, alongside the familiar collapse of narrative levels:

For no particular reason that he was aware of, Quinn turned to a clean page of the red notebook and sketched a little map of the area Stillman had wandered in.

Then, looking carefully through his notes, he began to trace with his pen the movements Stillman had made on a single day – the first day he had kept a full record of the old man's wanderings. The result was as follows. [...]

Quinn was struck by the way Stillman had skirted around the edge of the territory, not once venturing into the center. The diagram looked a little like a map of some imaginary state in the Midwest. Except for the series of curlicues that represented Stillman's wanderings in Riverside Park, the picture also resembled a rectangle. On the other hand, given the quadrant structure of New York streets, it might have been a zero or the letter 'O.'

Quinn went on to the next day and decided to see what would happen. The results were not at all the same.

This picture made Quinn think of a bird, a bird of prey perhaps, with its wings spread, hovering aloft in the air. A moment later, this reading seemed far-fetched to him. The bird vanished, and in its stead were only two abstract shapes, linked by the tiny bridge Stillman had formed by walking west on 83rd Street. Quinn paused for a moment to consider what he was doing. Was he scribbling nonsense? (Auster 105–108)

exercise that deals with fiction. We are using another source in search of 'new' insight but, in the end, we are asking it to provide us with traditional types of information" (1994: 337).

Transgressions across levels in this text also seem to stage the process of geographical mapping. "Re-implacement" as a process of putting on display the representation of representation is an alternative, geographical way of considering the relationship between the environment and the text that is co-represented alongside the complexities of multiplying levels of reality, a trope of postmodernist novels. In City of Glass as a whole, the metafictional loops are usually drawn between author, text, and fictional characters, but we can think about how the geography and descriptions of the environment also short-circuit the conventions of representation.

Here the represented place – New York – undergoes an essentially transgressive mutation. This passage is an embedded instance of aerial description, where the protagonist, Quinn, is experiencing an aerial view as he maps his day of following another man, Stillman. He later shows anxiety about this choice to draw this map, as it was not supposed to be part of his job to develop a theory of Stillman's movements – to describe them, in Relph's integrative, geographical sense. Quinn begins drawing these maps in his notebook (also represented pictographically in the novel) alongside notes about Stillman's behavior. This turn towards mapping and particularly describing Stillman's mundane, daily behavior through the geographical survey of an aerial view converts Quinn's mounting distrust of coherent and predictable human behavior into trust in the form of the environment. His interpretation of this map-description wavers as he wonders if the shapes are random and so only seem coherent because of the gridded form of Manhattan's streets and sidewalks.

Whether or not the randomness is attributable to Stillman's behavior or the constraints of the gridded streets is impossible to untangle, a chiasmus as meaningful as the fictional protagonist Quinn taking a call and assuming the identity of "Paul Auster" earlier in the novel. The revelation (or delusion) that Stillman is writing/walking out the letters to spell "THE TOWER OF BABEL" begins Quinn's decline into total paranoia and doubt. While this seemingly spontaneous mapping, "scribbling nonsense," is an overt spoof of detective genre tropes where apparently rational deduction guides narrative progression, from this perspective, New York's urban geography bridges the resultant unfolding of the story logic. The mapped view-from-above is presented as an overtly imaginary reformulation of the progression of the story of Quinn following Stillman in the previous chapters.

Here we have a direct example of Levine's thesis that "The form that best captures the experience of colliding forms is narrative. [...] What narrative form affords is a careful attention to the ways in which forms come together, and what happens when and after they meet" (19). This instance from City of Glass could be interpreted, following Levine, as a clash between the narrative form of the detective novel and the social form of urban anonymity. But it is also a clash resulting from re-implacing the urban landscape by mapping it in relation to the text itself. From this perspective, narratological models of discourse space built on cognitive science, psycholinguistics, rhetoric, or semantics all actually implicitly deny this third term – environment – by subordinating description to experience or communication of narrative discourse. This issue is a familiar one in the history of narratology, as increasingly reflexive and complex forms of narration have demanded multiplications of these models to account, for example, for how metalepsis functions.

4 Conclusion - Form and environment

Levine criticizes literary theory for taking too literally the spatial metaphor of "closure" as definitive of narrative form. Similarly, we can ask why representations of the environment have not been assessed through a more precise formal lens. The above arguments about literary form can be extended to environmental forms, or landscape. Andrew Thacker (2017) summarizes potential new goals for literary study that foregrounds environment not just thematically, but formally and methodologically: "We should reconnect the representational spaces in literary texts not only to the material spaces they depict but also reverse the movement and understand how social spaces dialogically help fashion the literary *forms* of texts" (34).

All three of my examples present possibilities for reversing our familiar thinking about the "directionality" of form and extending it further from description to the landscape to which it is related. In Cather, determinate human perspective-taking cannot take place on the Divide, a space that is marked by essentially indeterminate features; in Bowles, the protagonist's own attempts at narrativization are denied by their irrelevance to the heights in which he finds himself; and in Auster, the narrative itself changes course when it is mapped into the urban geography. This is not just a merely clever theoretical maneuver toward narrative in space, but an attempt to bridge closer toward a methodology currently disparate from narratology's treatment of space. Casey has worked for this in philosophy, and his claim about landscape presents an interesting opening for further theorization of description and environment by narratologists: "The truth is that representation is not a contingent matter, something merely secondary; it is integral to the perception of landscape itself – indeed, part of its being and essential to its manifestation" (2002: xv; emphasis in original). Dealing with overtly imaginary manifestations in fiction allows the critic to disentangle what is the apparently integral tie between perception and landscape and to think about the role that description and imagery plays in the form of the environment.

The difference in these two intentional stances toward the environment (perceiving consciousness and imagining consciousness), of course, is not just apparent in the reading experience, though this is where it is most evident because of literary narrative's existence as the nodal point of colliding forms (as noted by Levine above). Bachelard clarifies the primacy of descriptive images in all types of reverie: "There exists a reverie of the lively look, a reverie which is animated in a pride of seeing, of seeing clearly, of seeing well, of seeing far, and this pride of vision is perhaps more accessible to the poet than to the painter: the painter must paint this super-elevated vision; the poet has only to proclaim it" (Bachelard 1971: 183). The point between relying on determinate signs of "superelevated vision" and the unique ability for literary images to indirectly "proclaim" it is the crux that a geographical narratology will have to define to productively engage with geography. The present essay has proposed that one way to do this is to foreground *description in space* rather than either narrative in space or space in narrative.

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