From Chronology to Cartography: Spatial Configurations in three works of Electronic Literature

MARGHERITA CERRI
Paris Nanterre University

Abstract

This article explores the role of cartography in electronic literature, examining how spatial structures shape narrative construction, reader interaction, and meaning-making. The increasing influence of digital media has redefined storytelling, shifting from a time-oriented to a space-oriented conception of narrative. While this transformation was anticipated in experimental print literature, it finds new and distinctive expressions in contemporary electronic literature, where maps function not merely as visual supplements but as dynamic storytelling devices. Through a comparative analysis of three works—*80 Days by Inkle*, which reinterprets Verne's classic through interactive paths that challenge colonial perspectives; *Not_A_Number* by Xavier Leton, which subverts traditional cartographic conventions through Google Maps, foregrounding individual and collective spatial experiences; and *Winnipeg: The Poem That Crossed the Atlantic* by María Mencía, which translates transatlantic migration into a navigable sea of fragmented narratives—this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how digital maps reconfigure narrative space. By situating these works within the framework of the spatial turn and electronic literature studies, the article aims to offer insights into how digital environments reshape reader engagement and expand the possibilities of literary cartography.

Keywords: electronic literature, comparative literature, narratology, media studies, postmodernism, spatial turn

http://interface.org.tw/ and http://interface.ntu.edu.tw/

From Chronology to Cartography: Spatial

Configurations in three works of Electronic Literature

Since the spatial turn in literary studies—widely recognized as having been shaped by the spread of new media and scientific advancements throughout the 20th century—the relationship between space and textuality has been the focus of extensive scholarly inquiry. In this context, it is particularly relevant to examine how this shift has influenced texts that not only reflect but fully exploit the affordances of digital media, as is the case with electronic literature. Among the various media that have contributed to a reconfiguration of spatial dimensions in literature— such as radio, cinema, and television—the computer has emerged as one of the most pervasive and transformative. Digital technologies have redefined spatial structures in literary texts, not only thematically but also formally, reshaping the conditions of textual production, distribution, and reception.

However, as Brazzelli has observed (Brazzelli, 2015), the crisis in the representation of modern and postmodern spatiality signals a fundamental instability in spatial configurations. Globalized space has become a site of tensions, movements, and flux, inhabited by both people and ideas, thereby fostering a more dynamic and plural perception of world-space. The notion of simultaneity, in particular, is central to the new media landscape: while the virtual world enables detachment from physical space, it also establishes novel modes of interaction with it. This shifting spatial paradigm is reflected in literary experimentation, where traditional structures are disrupted in favor of new, non-linear narrative strategies.

A key feature of postmodern literature, in this regard, is its emphasis on a "horizontal" organization of textual space, often materialized through the use of maps, diagrams, and other spatial schemata that shape the

reading experience. One notable example is Georges Perec's *Life: A User's Manual* (Perec, 1978), in which a map of an apartment building serves as the foundational structure of the novel. However, rather than following a conventional sequential order, the chapters unfold according to the movement of a knight in chess. This non-linear organization not only challenges conventional narrative directionality but also reflects a broader attempt to reorder and systematize a fragmented textual world.

Such sensitivity to spatial representation as both a narrative and structural device extends into contemporary electronic literature. While existing scholarship has extensively examined how interactivity in digital texts reconfigures the reading experience—granting the reader/user an active role in manipulating, reshaping, and navigating the text—the specific implications of cartographic elements in electronic literature remain a relatively underexplored area of study.

A closer examination of the cartographical dimension in electronic literature thus offers not only a means to analyze spatial configurations but also an opportunity to investigate the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. In digital texts, maps frequently function as interactive guides, structuring the reader's movement within the storyworld and influencing their perception of time, plot progression, and character development. The integration of spatial structures into digital storytelling thereby calls for a reconsideration of the ways in which narrative space operates within electronic literature, challenging and expanding upon conventional literary forms.

In an effort to move closer to this goal, this study examines three contemporary works of electronic literature that incorporate cartographic elements as integral structural components rather than as mere visual supplements. The selected works—*80 Days* by Inkle (UK, 2014), *Not_a_number* by Xavier Leton (Belgium, 2019), and *The Winnipeg: The Poem that Crossed the Atlantic* by Maria Mencía (UK, Spain, Chile)—illustrate distinct ways in which mapping functions as a dynamic narrative device, opening up fruitful lines of inquiry. Produced within the past decade and included in the fourth volume of the Elec-

tronic Literature Organization (ELO)[1], these works exemplify how spatial structures in digital media reshape the interaction between reader and text.

By situating these works within the theoretical framework of the spatial turn and recent research on electronic literature, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of the narrative and cognitive implications of cartographic devices in digital storytelling. Examining how spatiality operates in these texts can offer a deeper perspective on electronic literature while also suggesting broader reflections on how digital environments reshape the experience of reading and interacting with narratives.

1 Electronic literature: definition and topographical implications

If the genre known as *electronic literature* represents one of the most compelling case studies at the intersection of literature and computing, its definition remains ambiguous, sparking ongoing debates and productive reflections aimed at formulating a precise characterization. A key definition, endorsed by the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO), states:

> What is Electronic Literature? The term refers to works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer[2].

This definition highlights both the literary components inherent in these works and their intentional design to exploit the affordances of electronic media. Thus, two central aspects emerge: on the one hand, the

---

1   (eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/)
2   (eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *About*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from http://www.eliterature.org/about)

literary dimension of these texts—although, as Bouchardon (Bouchardon, 2013, p.38) points out, this assertion is almost tautological within literary criticism, reflecting the fluidity of the concept itself—and, on the other hand, their intrinsically digital nature. These works are not only conceived and created with the aid of a computer, but their primary mode of consumption also takes place within a digital environment.

Several common characteristics can be identified in works of electronic literature (Landow, 1992, p.4):

1. Fragmentary Structure – These texts are typically composed of smaller sections (such as chapters, verses, or fragments) rather than being conceived as a single, unified narrative.

2. Multisequentiality – The arrangement of these sections is often non-linear, allowing for multiple potential sequences and producing a narrative that varies with each reading.

3. Interactivity – Many works of electronic literature require direct engagement from the reader/user. This interactivity can range from strong (where the reader actively contributes to the text) to weaker forms (such as modifying the order of sequences), but it remains central to the reading experience.

Moreover, multisequentiality often leads to a "topographic" form of narrative development, a characteristic frequently observed in electronic literature (although not an absolute trend). This concept, as theorized by Jay David Bolter—drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida—emphasizes the spatial nature of textual organization. Bolter argues that topographic writing is not exclusive to electronic literature, as precedents can be found in literary production prior to the advent of digital media. However, he highlights that computers amplify and make this process more intuitive:

Whenever we divide our text into unitary topics and organize those units into a connected structure and whenever we conceive of this textual structure spatially as well as verbally, we are writing topographically […]. Although the computer is not necessary for topographic writing, it is only in the computer that

the mode becomes a natural, and therefore also a conventional, way to write.

(Bolter,1991, p. 25)

Bolter further observes that, in digital environments, the relationships between different sections of a text no longer follow a strictly hierarchical structure, where each element depends linearly on those preceding and succeeding it, as in a traditional narrative sequence. Instead, electronic literature fosters a more open, egalitarian, and flexible structure among textual components.

At the same time, rather than diminishing the semantic relationships between textual elements, topographic writing enhances them, allowing each unit to interact with multiple others and generating a network of potential meanings (Bolter, 1991, p. 21). This network is facilitated by the active role played by the reader, which brings attention to another crucial aspect of time and space in electronic literature: the extraliterary dimension required for the text to be performed. Such extraliterary dimension does not exist in isolation but interacts dynamically with the space-time of the literary work itself.

In reconstructing the text, the reader navigates various possible pathways, forging a sense of coherence through their chosen reading despite the inherent fragmentation of the work. As a result, the narrative becomes "a labyrinth, a game, or an imaginative text, in which the reader can explore at will, get lost, discover secret paths, play around, follow the rules, and so on" (Aarseth, 1997, p. 3). This interaction can take various forms, but it is always present, and an awareness of its mechanics is often key to understanding the narrative strategies employed by the authors (Di Gennaro, 2014).

Thus, the semantic properties of time and space within a text—such as the locations mentioned, the situations described, and the physical imagery depicted—are altered depending on their position within the different possible reading sequences. In this way, spatial and temporal coordinates in electronic literature are not merely factors that shape the

reader's experience; they are also transformed through the act of reading itself (Di Gennaro, 2014, p. 3).

If scholars such as Bolter and Aarseth have emphasized the significance of the topographical dimension in electronic literature, the following analysis of *80 Days* by Studio Inkle will offer a more in-depth examination of the role and function of the map within the narrative.

2 *80 Days* : Reshaping Verne in the Digital Realm Through Cartography

A compelling parallel can be drawn between the roles of the author and the cartographer, as both engage in the process of world-making—one through literary construction, the other through spatial representation. Like mapping, narration does not merely depict reality; it actively constructs it, offering a structured interpretation of space (King, 1996, pp. 16-17). Furthermore, both maps and texts require interpretation by the reader, who reconstructs meaning through engagement with the medium. In this sense, maps are not neutral representations of space; they play a crucial role in territorial appropriation. Just as literature shapes a particular vision of the world, maps impose a specific order upon it, while simultaneously establishing their own distinct language. Consequently, maps possess semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic dimensions that influence the perception and understanding of space (Casti, 1998).

These characteristics are clearly evident in the first work under examination, *80 Days*[3]. Developed in 2014 by the UK-based studio Inkle, this video game (which, due to its literary orientation, can also be described as a digital game book) draws inspiration from *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the classic 19th-century novel by Jules Verne. In the game, the player assumes the role of Passepartout, the loyal and resourceful French servant to Phileas Fogg, an English gentleman of high society. With the help of his considerable wealth, Fogg undertakes the ambitious challenge of circumnavigating the globe in eighty days. However, as is

---

3 (eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *80 days*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/80-days)

typical with such adaptations, the game introduces numerous deviations from Verne's original novel, reshaping the narrative and its mechanics within an interactive digital framework.

What qualifies *80 Days* as electronic literature is its rich textual foundation: the descriptions of locations, explanations of situations, and dialogues among characters are extensive, well-crafted, and have been praised by various reviewers for their literary quality. Moreover, the game stands out for the multitude of choices it offers to the player. In contrast to the traditional novel by Verne— which itself is a rewriting of earlier travel narratives— in which the reader follows the steps of the protagonist without agency, *80 Days* grants the player full control over every decision, movement, and action regarding the traversal of space.

At various points, the player must choose from textual alternatives to advance the story: should the characters visit the market or stay at the hotel? Should they engage in conversation with a newcomer or remain silent? Should they travel in one direction or another? While the structure resembles classic choose-your-own-adventure books, the scale and complexity of choices in *80 Days* are far more intricate, transcending simple binary decisions. For example, helping a character early in the game may later prove crucial when that same character reappears, eager to return the favor. This dynamic structure enhances the narrative, making it highly engaging, unpredictable, and skillfully balanced. It avoids excessive exposition while maintaining the suspense characteristic of a well-crafted adventure novel.

The map is, of course, central to a work of this kind, providing the player with constant access to select their route and strategically manage the journey within predetermined time constraints. The objective of the game mirrors that of the protagonists in the original novel: to return to London—also the starting point—within 80 days. However, while the departure and destination appear clearly defined, the true essence of the game lies in the traversal of space itself.

The ideological and practical significance of cartography in imperial

and colonial contexts has been a central concern in postcolonial studies, particularly in the works of Edward Said. Said's primary aim was to expose the privileges often claimed by European and American authors in their representations of other cultures, emphasizing the asymmetry of power in which "the West" observes while "the East" is observed. His focus on vision and visuality underscores the cultural construction of the gaze, revealing that imaginative geographies are not merely cognitive constructs but are shaped by fantasy, desire, and comparative valuations. Drawing on Bachelard (1969), in *Orientalism* Said described this as a "poetics of space," wherein places acquire figurative meanings that influence not only the perception of the "Other" but also the formation of the viewer's own identity. Imaginative geographies, therefore, do not solely construct notions of "elsewhere" but also serve to define a sense of "home." As Said explains, "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said, 1978, p. 55).

Crucially, Said argued that these imaginative geographies take material form and, over time, solidify into a self-reinforcing archive— a system of references that is inherently performative. This structure shapes and legitimizes the attitudes, policies, and practices of its audience, ensuring that representations of Otherness endure through repetition and institutional validation. Furthermore, Said challenged the conventional distinction between real and perceived space, asserting that imaginative geographies, while constructed, are not devoid of substance or reality. Instead, they operate within a broader ideological framework that continuously reproduces and sustains a particular vision of the world.

A key aspect of Said's theory of imaginative geographies is how maps, while seemingly neutral, are imbued with ideological power, shaping and legitimizing particular visions of the world. This process of territorial appropriation is evident in the reimagining of Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* within the game *80 Days*. By allowing players to deviate from the traditional imperial routes (for instance, opting for a journey through Russia rather than the Indian subcontinent), the game

destabilizes the colonial gaze and offers an alternative mode of spatial engagement. In doing so, it disrupts the constructed hierarchies embedded in both narrative and cartography, providing a powerful example of how digital spaces can challenge and reframe historically entrenched systems of power. Just as Said's concept of imaginative geographies critiques the Western construction of the "Other," *80 Days* enables players to navigate a world where the marginalized are empowered to define their own paths and alternative geopolitical realities.

Moreover, the game takes significant historical liberties, beginning with its reimagined London setting, which is infused with a steampunk aesthetic that incorporates robots and futuristic machines. This creative departure allows the game to anticipate independence movements, establish new empires, and introduce alternative political forces. For example, during the characters' journey through the Americas, they encounter not the post-independence United States, but Haiti, portrayed as a powerful and affluent nation. This portrayal shifts the historical perspective on Haiti's revolution, emphasizing a more nuanced view of its political significance. By reimagining Haiti as a strong, sovereign entity, the game challenges traditional colonial narratives and engages in the reappropriation of political space by groups historically marginalized or excluded from dominant narratives. In doing so, *80 Days* allows these once-overlooked subjects to reclaim their agency and redefine their place within global history.

In this context, the spaces within *80 Days* are not simply passive locations of observation but active arenas of exchange and interaction that challenge conventional Western narratives of dominance and control. The characters the protagonists encounter during their journey are far from the static, one-dimensional representations of the "Other" that are typical in colonial discourse. Instead, these characters are presented with multifaceted, dynamic identities, subverting the traditional binary between the West and the non-West. The game places a strong emphasis on the agency of non-Western characters, who play crucial roles in advancing the narrative. Additionally, players are encouraged to make choices that demonstrate respect for female characters and en-

gage meaningfully with diverse cultures and religions, offering a nu-
anced critique of the Western gaze. However, this respect is not simply
rewarded; players must prove their sincerity through repeated 'tests',
highlighting the performative nature of cultural interaction. Non-West-
ern characters, far from being sidelined, are depicted as active agents
who invent advanced technologies, command airship fleets, and con-
trol automated armies. These representations disrupt traditional power
dynamics and offer a reimagined geopolitical landscape that critiques
colonial representations, providing a more inclusive and multifaceted
vision of global history.

In this respect, in contrast to Verne's portrayal, which reduces Aouda
to a passive object of male desire and colonial intervention, the game
offers a far more active and subversive reimagining of her character. By
placing Aouda at the helm of a rebellion against British colonial forces,
the game allows her to transcend the stereotypical role of the "damsel in
distress[4]". This repositioning of Aouda not only challenges the colonial
mindset that informs her original representation but also imbues her
character with agency and purpose, thus redefining her narrative within
a decolonized framework.

In the game, Aouda's leadership of a rebel faction against British im-
perialism shifts the power dynamic considerably, positioning her as an
antagonist to the colonial forces, rather than a victim of them. Her new-
found role disrupts the Eurocentric and gendered assumptions that often
shape characters in colonial narratives, replacing her passive gratitude
with active resistance. By doing so, the game offers a critique of the co-
lonial gaze and reimagines the possibilities for female characters from
marginalized backgrounds, granting them the autonomy to shape their
own destinies.

The decision not to have Aouda continue with the protagonists on their

---

4   As mentioned in interviews with Meg Jayanth, the writer of the game: Jayanth, M. (2014, August
31). *80 Days: Protagonism and problematics*. Heterogeneous Tasks. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from
https://heterogenoustasks.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/80-days-protagonism-and-problematics/

The Literary Platform. (2014, July). *Don't be a hero: 80 Days, the game*. Retrieved December 12, 2024,
from https://theliteraryplatform.com/news/2014/07/dont-be-a-hero-80-days-the-game/

journey further reflects the game's subversion of traditional narrative structures. While Verne's Aouda is an integral part of the journey, her function in the novel is primarily as a reward for Fogg's success. In *80 Days*, however, the characters' interactions are more fluid and open to choice, reflecting a narrative that is shaped by the player's decisions rather than by a predetermined storyline. Aouda's departure from the journey highlights the idea that the game does not view secondary characters as mere accessories to the main plot, but rather as individuals with their own paths and agency. This shift away from the traditional linear structure of the novel offers players a more egalitarian and dynamic form of engagement with the narrative.

These alterations not only enrich the narrative with new possibilities and dynamics but also challenge and subvert the original narrative's colonial biases. By incorporating steampunk elements and reshaping historical contexts, *80 Days* offers a reinterpretation that engages critically with the themes of imperialism and cultural representation, making it a distinctive example of electronic literature. Through its dynamic reimagining of characters, space, and power structures, the game not only breathes new life into a classic narrative but also invites players to question and rethink the colonial legacies embedded in traditional storytelling. In doing so, *80 Days* contributes to the ongoing conversation around the decolonization of literature, demonstrating how digital media can be used to reframe and revitalize the narratives that have long shaped our understanding of history, culture, and identity.

3 Poetic Cartography and the Reappropriation of Space in *Not_a_ Number*

If the use of the map in *80 Days* was primarily directed at reclaiming spatial representation from colonial frameworks while emphasizing the importance of choice, its narrative structure remained anchored to a chronological and cause-effect order typical of traditional storytelling: the goal was to tell a story with a clear beginning and end. This approach shifts significantly in *Not_a_Number*, created between 2019 and

2021 by Xavier Leton as part of *VillesAllantVers*, a project initiated in 2011 between France, Belgium and Italy. According to Leton, *Not_a_Number*:

> […] Est une création collective. Elle se réalise sous la forme d'ateliers ouverts aux participants de tous âges. Lors de l'atelier, nous collectons les « parcours » de chacun. Nous demandons à chacun d'entre nous de choisir une rue et d'associer à ce chemin, des sons, des couleurs, des formes, des odeurs. En liant ces choix les uns aux autres, nous réalisons la carte d'une « ville invisible [5].

The project encompasses a variety of artistic outputs, from generative poetry to experimental cinema, with urban space as a central theme. On one hand, *Not_a_Number* investigates how individuals — especially marginalized communities — can reclaim space. On the other, it explores what Leton, drawing inspiration from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, refers to as the "invisible" aspects of the urban environment: spaces of culture, encounters, and exchange, but also emotional landscapes where public space resonates with private, individual experiences.

For this reason, Leton's project is fundamentally collective and participatory. Workshop participants contribute personal elements — memories, scents, sensations—which form the foundation of the work. The virtual city Leton reconstructs offers a means of reclaiming urban space, enabling individuals to navigate and engage with it through the lens of art and poetry, proposing new potential pathways.

Leton's emphasis on the social dimension of space and the multiplicity of perceptions can be effectively analyzed through Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1986). Lefebvre conceptualizes space not as a neutral, empty container but as a product of

---

5   "It is a collective creation. It takes the form of workshops open to participants of all ages. During the workshop, we collect each participant's "journeys." We ask everyone to choose a street and associate sounds, colors, shapes, and smells with this path. By linking these choices together, we create the map of an "invisible city." [The translation is mine]. Leton, X. (n.d.). VillesAllantVers. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://villesallantvers.org/lig_mrs_lig/?page_id=197

social relations, structured through both reproductive relations (such as gender roles and family structures) and productive relations (such as labor and hierarchies). Lefebvre's concept of "social space" critically examines social relations, encompassing both reproductive relations (such as gender roles and family structures) and productive relations (such as division of labor and hierarchies). Influenced by Marxism and psychoanalysis, his work delves into the socio-spatial production process, culminating in his renowned spatial triad.

Lefebvre's spatial triad—perceived space (everyday spatial practices), conceived space (technical and ideological representations), and lived space (symbolic and emotional experiences)—serves as a crucial methodological framework for analyzing urban environments, emphasizing that it should not be regarded as a mere abstract model but as a concrete analytical tool. Within this triad, lived space encompasses the symbolic and cultural dimensions of space, shaped by history and individual experiences, often in a fragmented and non-cohesive manner. In contrast, conceived space—predominantly shaped by planners, architects, and technocrats—operates as the domain of technical and ideological representations, privileging rationality and often reinforcing capitalist and colonial paradigms. Lefebvre critiques this positivist approach for its tendency to marginalize the lived and experiential dimensions of space in favor of administrative and economic control. Finally, perceived space is directly tied to everyday spatial practices, reflecting the ways in which individuals experience, navigate, and appropriate their environments, revealing the dynamic interplay between spatial structures and human agency.

Leton's work explicitly engages with these spatial dimensions, particularly by privileging lived space. In the workshops, each participant becomes, in a sense, a cartographer of their own *perceived space*, contributing to a broader collective narrative that challenges the top-down imposition of *conceived space*. Through poetic representation, the project resists the rigid, functionalist vision of the city dictated by institutions, instead foregrounding a more fluid, personal spatiality shaped by individual experiences (Brazzelli, 2015, p. 37; Mallory-Simpson-Hous-

ley, 1987, p. XI).

This focus is evident in *Not_a_Number*'s engagement with the spaces inhabited by migrants in Marseille and in visual and written sequences that capture the city as it is lived: the rush of passersby at a tram station, the same location photographed at different times, or a 360-degree rotation that destabilizes spatial perception. These elements correspond to Lefebvre's notion of *perceived space*—the everyday, sensory engagement with the urban environment. By resisting a static, purely cartographic representation of the city, Leton instead highlights its evolving, relational nature.

Many of Leton's artistic practices demonstrate a strong intermedial approach, blending photography, video, sound, digital mapping, and poetic text to construct a multi-layered representation of urban space. This method aligns with Lefebvre's assertion that space is not a fixed, abstract entity but a dynamic, socially produced reality. The juxtaposition of different media reflects the multiplicity of lived experiences, challenging dominant narratives and inviting participatory engagement.

This intermediality is particularly significant in the context of electronic literature, which inherently relies on multimodal storytelling. In works like *Not_a_Number*, the digital medium becomes integral to spatial construction, enabling fluid and nonlinear exploration. Hyperlinks, interactive maps, and multimedia elements not only reinforce the thematic concerns of the work but also transform the reader into an active participant, mirroring the ways individuals navigate and shape urban environments. Through this interplay of media, the work resists the rigid structures of *conceived space* and instead foregrounds the fluid, evolving nature of *lived space*.

One of the most compelling outcomes of *Not_a_Number* is *Itinéraire [urbain] conseillé*, which begins with a Google Maps link directing the user to a real map of Marseille. A route is traced through emblematic neighborhoods such as Le Panier, La Joliette, and La Major. Along the path, users encounter points of interest shaped by workshop par-

ticipants' experiences, highlighted through video links and newspaper articles. The work is fully accessible online, yet it also holds the potential for physical navigation—users could traverse the same route in real space, activating digital content upon arrival at each destination. This interplay between physical and virtual spaces reinforces the relational and subjective nature of spatial perception.

Engaging spatially in these ways resonates with Edward Soja's concept of thirdspace (Soja, 1989), a theoretical extension of Lefebvre's spatial triad. While Lefebvre's focus remains on the dialectic between perceived, conceived, and lived space, Soja reinterprets and expands this model, framing *thirdspace* as a hybrid, open-ended, and dynamic realm—one that transcends the binary opposition between material (firstspace) and imagined (secondspace) space. Soja's thirdspace is not just a fusion of these dimensions; it is an explicitly political space, a site of resistance where hegemonic spatial orders can be challenged and reimagined.

In *Not_a_Number*, this is particularly evident in how the work disrupts the imposed spatial logic of Marseille—mapped and structured according to institutional and economic forces—and instead foregrounds the lived, often marginalized experiences of its inhabitants. The digital medium enhances this dynamic, enabling a form of spatial reconfiguration that is not entirely bound by physical geography. This aligns with Soja's idea that *thirdspace* is a space of possibility, where new meanings and narratives emerge through interaction and interpretation.

Thus, Leton's work does more than merely represent space; it actively participates in its redefinition, transforming the city from a fixed, cartographic entity or an abstract, planned construct into an interactive, relational, and socially constructed experience. Therefore, the experience of *Not_a_Number* is not only deeply personal, shaped by user engagement, but also emblematic of a broader spatial critique—one that challenges dominant urban representations and highlights the role of artistic and digital interventions in reshaping our understanding of space.

4 Navigating Memory: *The Winnipeg* and the Digital Remapping of History

The final work under examination is *The Winnipeg: The Poem That Crossed the Atlantic* created in 2018 by the artist and researcher Maria Mencía[6]. Winnipeg is the name of the ship that, under the initiative of poet Pablo Neruda—who was also the Chilean consul in France at the time—transported hundreds of Spanish Republicans to Chile in 1939. These individuals, exiled during the Spanish Civil War, had been interned in French concentration camps; among the passengers was the author's grandfather. During her research into the Winnipeg archives, Mencía uncovered this deeply personal connection between broader historical events and her family's past. This discovery became the catalyst for a work that integrates archival research, digital poetics, and interactive engagement, constructing a memory space where history is re-experienced through textual exploration.

Mencía's work presents users with a map of the Atlantic Ocean transformed into a sea of letters and words. A chain of proper names stretches from France to Valparaíso, Chile, tracing the route of the ship. To access the texts, users must click on one of the names or letters, triggering a zoom effect that draws them closer to the passengers' individual stories—stories meticulously reconstructed from the letters floating in the background.

The narratives in *Winnipeg* appear in multiple languages (French, Spanish, and English) and vary in genre: some passages resemble historical essays, others are biographical; some are deeply emotional, while others maintain a more detached tone. Certain narratives unfold in the present, following descendants as they reconstruct their ancestors' histories, whereas others are set in 1939, reimagining the journey itself. Additionally, the work incorporates rewritings of Facebook posts and literary reflections on Neruda's poetry, reinforcing the palimpsestic nature of historical memory.

---

6 (eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *The Winnipeg*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/the-winnipeg)

The richness of *Winnipeg's* texts stems from the plurality of testimonies found in the Winnipeg archive. Like other projects of collaborative digital storytelling, *Winnipeg* is driven by ideological motivations: it seeks to recover and recount a long-overlooked chapter of history by giving voice and space to its protagonists. The Spanish political dissidents, imprisoned in French concentration camps, were a marginalized group not only during the events themselves but also in the years that followed, as their arrival in Chile was often met with silence and shame. As Mencía emphasizes in the "Background" section, this historical marginalization echoes contemporary migration crises and experiences of forced displacement.

Although, rather than functioning as a conventional digital archive, *Winnipeg* reimagines remembrance as an interactive and experiential process. Many archival projects dedicated to silenced histories focus on documentation, offering access to digitized testimonies, official records, and historical materials. While these repositories are invaluable for preserving the past, their structure often reinforces a static and linear approach to historical narrative. As Michel Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1990), archives are not neutral repositories of information but mechanisms of power that shape and regulate what is remembered and how. The authority to classify, preserve, and interpret documents typically resides within institutional frameworks, reinforcing dominant historical discourses while marginalizing alternative perspectives.

By contrast, *Winnipeg* does not merely store memory but actively reshapes it through participation, inviting readers to navigate a fragmented, evolving landscape of testimonies. The reader, much like the exiled passengers themselves, must chart a path through a shifting terrain of stories. This interactivity reflects the nonlinear and unstable nature of memory, transforming the act of remembering into a process shaped by movement, interaction, and personal interpretation.

To further understand the interplay between memory and space in *Winnipeg*, it is useful to consider the phenomenological perspective adopted

by Edward Casey in *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Casey, 1987). Casey offers a broad reflection on the nature of memory, analyzing it through different lenses: the act of remembering, mnemonic modes, and the connection between body and place memory. In the chapter dedicated to "place memory," Casey argues that memory is deeply place-oriented: often, a memory is either of a place itself (such as one's childhood home) or of an event or person situated in a specific locale. Conversely, it is rare to recall a person or event without an associated place (Casey, 1987, p. 183).

Casey also introduces the concept of the body as an "inter-place" (Casey, 1987, p. 196), emphasizing its role in movement and transition between spaces. This is particularly relevant to *Winnipeg*, as it recounts the forced migration of Spanish exiles across the ocean—a history of displaced bodies in transit. The Winnipeg itself, as both a historical and digital entity, embodies this movement: it is not only a means of transportation but a space of lived experience, where memory is forged through physical and emotional displacement. The ship, as an inter-place, exists in a liminal state, distinct from its departure and arrival points yet intrinsically connected to them. The navigational experience of the work reflects this dynamic, as the reader's interaction with the interface replicates the uncertain, unpredictable journey of exile.

Regarding the role of the Web in the transmission of memory and the specificity of the ship as a space, Mencía states:

> I liked the idea of the vessel with its many stories to be the poem. These interconnected stories of the passengers and family which this cargo vessel carried, with their feelings, hopes, and farewells, are now represented in the sea of the World Wide Web, together with the poems by Pablo Neruda and relevant information about this event[7].

This statement resonates with Aristotle's Physics (Aristotle, IV: 2, 209

---

7   (Mencía, M. *The Winnipeg*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://winnipeg.mariaMencía.com/#backg)

b 28-30), where the vessel serves as a metaphor for space itself—a container that holds and shapes what is within it. Similarly, the Winnipeg functions as both a literal space of exile and displacement and a symbolic repository of voices once at risk of being forgotten. At the same time, Casey observes that "an alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favor and parallel its own activities." (Casey 1987, p. 186) Thus, memory in *Winnipeg* is not only place-oriented but also place-sustained: it thrives not on indifferently dispersed data but on the specificity of sites where the past is anchored and made meaningful.

In this way, *Winnipeg* demonstrates how electronic literature reconfigures memory and space, transcending its physical dimensions to become an interactive repository of remembrance. As Husserl observed in his phenomenological reflections on time (Husserl, 1964; Di Gennaro, 2014, p. 4), the temporal experience in traditional texts unfolds sequentially, progressing line by line. By contrast, in hypertextual electronic literature, the literary world cannot be grasped in its entirety; it reveals itself progressively through the act of reading. The reader, therefore, plays a crucial role in determining the final configuration of the work, opening up multiple trajectories, pathways, and interpretative possibilities that vary with each engagement. In this sense, the search for meaning becomes not only metaphorical but also spatial, as "it is his/her task to decide what pace to keep through the page he/she has chosen, and vice versa: in hypertexts, time and space are never neutral" (Di Gennaro, 2014, p. 4).

Mencía's work thus raises broader questions about the role of digital technologies in shaping cultural remembrance. Can interactive platforms foster a more democratic, participatory space for historical engagement? Does the fragmentation of digital narratives enhance our understanding of history's complexities, or does it risk disorienting our perception of the past? By harnessing the potential of electronic literature, *Winnipeg* does not merely reconstruct a historical episode; it explores how memory itself is shaped by the media through which it is mediated. It exemplifies how digital storytelling can function both as an

artistic and historiographical practice, bridging personal and collective memory.

Ultimately, *Winnipeg* challenges the idea that memory is static, demonstrating that remembering is a dynamic process shaped by interaction, exploration, and technological mediation.

5 Conclusions

The comparative analysis of *80 Days*, *Not_a_Number*, and *The Winnipeg* highlights the diverse ways in which digital literary works employ cartographic structures to shape narrative engagement, reader interaction, and the construction of memory. While *80 Days* repurposes the map as a playful interface, transforming geographical space into a terrain of choice and strategy, *Not a Number* subverts conventional cartographic functions, turning the map into an unstable, shifting space that mirrors the protagonist's disorientation in front of the postmodern society. In contrast, *The Winnipeg* mobilizes the map as an archival and mnemonic device, reconfiguring the reader's traversal as an act of participatory remembrance, where movement across the digital interface becomes a means of reactivating silenced histories.

These three works demonstrate how the map, traditionally associated with stability, authority, and fixed representations of space, can be reinterpreted through digital literature as a dynamic, multifaceted structure that intertwines space, time, and subjectivity. The interplay between navigation, narrative progression, and reader agency challenges conventional models of storytelling, foregrounding the epistemological and affective dimensions of spatial representation. Moreover, by positioning the reader as an active agent within these cartographic frameworks, these works reveal how digital literature can interrogate and reimagine the functions of maps beyond their conventional role.

Ultimately, the study of these digital narratives underscores the broader implications of spatial storytelling in contemporary literary and media

practices. As digital literature continues to explore new modalities of spatial engagement, the relationship between cartography, interactivity, and memory emerges as a key site of experimentation, offering alternative ways to conceive and experience narrative space. These works not only reflect evolving conceptions of space in the digital age but also challenge readers to reconsider their own navigational practices—both within textual environments and beyond. In this sense, digital cartographies do not merely represent space; they actively shape the way it is perceived, traversed, and remembered. The act of reading becomes an act of mapping, and in turn, an act of meaning-making—one that is fluid, participatory, and deeply intertwined with the technologies that mediate it.

References

Aarseth, E. J. (1997). *Cybertext : Perspectives on ergodic literature*. Baltimore, MD & London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Aristotle. (1957). *The Physics. 1: General Introduction. Books 1-4.* English translation by Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis M. Cornford (Revised). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann.

Bolter, J. D. (1991). *Writing space: The computer, hypertext, and the history of writing*. Hillsdale, NJ : L. Erlbaum Associates.

Bouchardon, S. (2013). *La valeur heuristique de la littérature numérique*. Paris: Hermann.

Brazzelli, N. (2015). Lo spazio e la sua rappresentazione. In *L'Antartide nell'immaginario inglese: Spazio geografico e rappresentazione letteraria* (pp. 25–50). Di/Segni. Milan: Ledizioni. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ledizioni.8520

Casey, E. (1987), *Remembering. A phenomenological study.* Indiana University Press.

Casti, E. (1998). *L'ordine del mondo e la sua rappresentazione*. Milan: Unicopli.

Di Gennaro, P. (2014). *Changing words: Reading time and space in electronic literature*. Between, IV(8). http://www.betweenjournal.it/

Foucault, M. (1990). *Les mots et les choses : Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. La Bibliothèque du XXe siècle. Paris : France Loisirs.

Husserl, E. (1964). *Leçons pour une phénoménologie de la conscience intime du temps*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France.

King, G. (1996). *Mapping reality: An exploration of cultural cartographies*. London: Macmillan.

Landow, G. (1992). *Hypertext: The convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lefebvre, H. (1986). *La production de l'espace* (3rd ed.). Paris: Anthropos.

Mallory, W. E., & Simpson-Housley, P. (1987). *Geography and literature: A meeting of the disciplines*. New York: Syracuse University Press.

Perec, G. (1978). *La vie mode d'emploi*. Paris : Hachette.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: A reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London & New York: Verso.

Web References

eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *80 days*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/80-days

eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *About*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from http://www.eliterature.org/about

eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *Not a number (NAN)*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/not_a_number-nan

eLiterature Organization. (n.d.). *The Winnipeg*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://collection.eliterature.org/4/the-winnipeg

Jayanth, M. (2014, August 31). *80 Days: Protagonism and problematics*. Heterogeneous Tasks. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://heterogenoustasks.wordpress.com/2014/08/31/80-days-protagonism-and-problematics/

Leton, X. (n.d.). *VillesAllantVers*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://villesallantvers.org/lig_mrs_lig/?page_id=197

Mencía, M. (n.d.). *The Winnipeg*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://winnipeg.mariaMencía.com/#backg

The Literary Platform. (2014, July). *Don't be a hero: 80 Days, the game*. Retrieved December 12, 2024, from https://theliteraryplatform.com/news/2014/07/dont-be-a-hero-80-days-the-game/