Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory

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> A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

> The waves of the sea, the little ripples on the shore, the sweeping curve of the sandy bay between the headlands, the outline of the hills, the shape of the clouds, all these are so many riddles of form, so many problems of morphology.
> —D'Arcy Thompson, *On Growth and Form*

The concept of spatial form has unquestionably been central to modern criticism not only of literature but of the fine arts and of language and culture in general. Indeed, the consistent goal of the natural and human sciences in the twentieth century has been the discovery and/or construction of synchronic structural models to account for concrete phenomena. The difficult questions arise when we try to relate these various kinds of models: Is the morphology of the folktale commensurate at any level with the designs of crystalline growth, the structures of syntax, the patterns of social organization, the morphogenetic fields of topology? Are all these analytical models properly regarded as "spatial forms," or is the term applied literally in some cases and metaphorically in others? If we could discriminate literal from metaphoric usage (are scientific models free of metaphor?), how would this discrimination affect the explanatory value of those models deemed "merely metaphoric"?[1] Are

1. As will become evident in the following pages, I do indeed regard all these diverse

some spatial forms "really there" in the world while others exist only as arbitrary and artificial constructs which might be replaced by any number of other models?[2]

These larger questions cannot be answered until we have reflected on the function of spatial form as an explanatory device and experiential phenomenon in the various fields to which it has been applied. The following essay concentrates on the problem of spatial form in literature and the languages of criticism with the aim of clarifying its role in reading and literary analysis and with the hope of relating the notion of

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models as "spatial forms," and I suspect that the discrimination between literal and metaphoric, real and artificial, can only be made provisionally and relatively. As Paul de Man has noted recently, "metaphors, tropes, and figural language in general have been a perennial problem and, at times, a recognized source of embarrassment for philosophical discourse . . ." (*Critical Inquiry* 5 [Autumn 1978]: 13). De Man locates this embarrassment in our inability to purify discourse of metaphor or even to find a way of "delimiting the boundaries of its influence and thus restricting the epistemological damage that it may cause." Throughout this essay, then, when I raise the problem of the "merely metaphoric" applicability of spatial form to literature, I will be treating it in something like Nelson Goodman's terms in *The Languages of Art* (Indianapolis, 1976)—as a provisional distinction within the realm of the actual:

> Metaphorical possession is indeed not *literal* possession; but possession is actual whether metaphorical or literal. The metaphorical and the literal have to be distinguished within the actual. Calling a picture sad and calling it gray are simply different ways of classifying it. That is, although a predicate that applies to an object metaphorically does not apply literally, it nevertheless applies. Whether the application is metaphorical or literal depends upon some such feature as its novelty. [Pp. 68–69]

2. On the related question of spatial form as a quality of things as opposed to an explanatory model, I will work from a similarly provisional standpoint; that is, I recognize that the outline of a tree, the outline drawing which represents a tree, and a tree diagram representing genealogical patterns or syntactic structures are radically different kinds of things. This does not negate, however, the significant fact that all these forms are, in some sense, spatial constructs which permeate experience as well as the analysis of experience and that the particular nature of each can best be defined in the context of a theory which recognizes what they have in common. In discussions of the arts, moreover, the distinctions between "properties" of works and explanatory models become even more difficult to maintain (is "organic form" a feature of works or an explanatory hypothesis?), and it thus becomes even more crucial to situate these distinctions in the context of a general theory. I do not, in other words, want to blur the differences between various kinds of spatial forms but to find a general basis from which multiple differences may be defined without the reification of binary oppositions such as "literal" versus "metaphoric" or "quality of the thing" versus "quality only of the model." If I may adopt a spatial metaphor, the purpose of this essay is to shape out an infinitely differentiated continuum rather than to divide things down the middle.

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literary or verbal space to the general problem of epistemological structures.

Although the notion of spatiality has always lurked in the background of discussions of literary form, the self-conscious use of the term as a critical concept is generally traced to Joseph Frank's seminal essay of 1945, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature."[3] Frank's basic argument is that modernist literary works (particularly by Eliot, Pound, and Joyce) are "spatial" insofar as they replace history and narrative sequence with a sense of mythic simultaneity and disrupt the normal continuities of English prose with disjunctive syntactic arrangements. This argument has been attacked on several fronts. An almost universal objection is that spatial form is a "mere metaphor" which has been given misplaced concreteness and that it denies the essentially temporal nature of literature. Some critics will concede that the metaphor contains a half-truth, but one which is likely to distract attention from more important features of the reading experience. The most polemical attacks have come from those who regard spatial form as an actual, but highly regrettable, characteristic of modern literature and who have linked it with antihistorical and even fascist ideologies.[4] Advocates of Frank's position, on the other hand, have generally been content to extrapolate his premises rather than criticize them, and have compiled an ever-mounting list of modernist texts which can be seen, in some sense, as "antitemporal." The whole debate can best be advanced, in my view, not by some patchwork compromise among the conflicting claims but by a radical, even outrageous statement of the basic hypothesis in its most general form. I propose, therefore, that far from being a unique phenomenon of some modern literature, and far from being restricted to the features which Frank identifies in those works (simultaneity and discontinuity), spatial form is a crucial aspect of the experience and interpretation of literature in all ages and cultures. The burden of proof, in other words, is not on Frank to show that some works have spatial form but on his critics to provide an example of any work that does not.

We must begin, however, by removing one of the major obstacles to any comprehension of the problem—the notion that spatial form is

3. Frank's essay first appeared in *Sewanee Review* 53 (Spring, Summer, Autumn 1945) and was revised in his *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1963). Frank's basic argument has not changed essentially even in his most recent statements; he still regards spatial form "as a particular phenomenon of modern avant-garde writing." See "Spatial Form: An Answer to Critics," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (Winter 1977): 231–52. A useful bibliography, "Space and Spatial Form in Narrative," is being compiled by Jeffrey Smitten (department of English, Texas Tech University).

4. This charge generally links the notion of spatial form with Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, the imagist movement, the "irrationality" and pessimistic antihistoricism of modernism, and the conservative Romantic tradition. Frank discusses the complex motives behind these associations in the work of Robert Weimann and Frank Kermode in his "Answer to Critics," pp. 238–48.

properly defined as an antithesis or alternative to temporal form and that literary works achieve "spatiality" only by denying temporality, usually defined as some form of sequence or continuity. The fact is that spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time, that we literally cannot "tell time" without the mediation of space.[5] All our temporal language is contaminated with spatial imagery: we speak of "long" and "short" times, of "intervals" (literally, "spaces between"), of "before" and "after"—all implicit metaphors which depend upon a mental picture of time as a linear continuum. If we are going to dismiss these expressions as mere metaphors, we had better abandon our clocks and their metaphors of circular time as well.[6] A more sensible solution is to note that we experience time in a wide variety of ways and that we consistently use spatial imagery to describe these experiences.[7] In literature, our sense of continuity, sequence, and linear progression is not nonspatial because it is temporal. Continuity and sequentiality are spatial images based in the schema of the unbroken line or surface; the experience of simultaneity or discontinuity is simply based in different kinds of spatial images from those involved in continuous, sequential experiences of time. Geometry has no difficulty in "mapping" both continuous and discontinuous functions in spatial coordinates, nor does it restrict one kind of function to space, the other to time. Readers do a similar kind of mapping, if less methodically, when they begin to construct images of temporal or other organizational patterns in any work of literature.

The common mistake of regarding space and time as antithetical modalities is reflected in the tendency of literary critics to speak of spatial form as "static," or "frozen," or as involving some simultaneous, instantaneous, and wholistic impression of that which is "really" temporal. It would require a lengthy excursion into the history of scientific philosophy to explain why spatial form has come to be thought of as a static, atemporal phenomenon; it is evidence at the very least of Newton's

5. See Rudolf Arnheim, "Space as an Image of Time," in *Images of Romanticism,* ed. Karl Kroeber and William Walling (New Haven, Conn., 1978), pp. 1–12. The psychological and historical priority of spatial concepts is argued at length by Max Jammer in his *Concepts of Space* (1954; New York, 1960), pp. 3–4.

6. Wayne Booth has raised a cagey objection to this point: What if we replace the circular clock face with a digital clock that displays nothing but a succession of numbers? Have we not then eliminated any need for spatial mediation of time? I fall back here on Bergson's claim that "we cannot form an image or idea of number without the accompanying intuition of space" (*Time and Free Will* [1910; New York, 1960], p. 78).

7. Jacques Derrida makes this point in an extreme form: "(Time, the form of all sensible phenomena, internal *and* external, seems to dominate space, the form of external sensible phenomena; but it is a time that one may always represent by a line . . .)" (*Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore, 1976], p. 290). We need not restrict ourselves, however, to linear representations of time. An impressionist painter could argue that the properly coded combinations of color, light, and shadow might serve as a rather exact index to diurnal time.

continuing sway over the Western imagination that his abstract and counterintuitive notion of absolute space has become as firmly implanted as the "prejudices" he sought to erase:

> I do not define time, space, place, and motion, as being well known to all. Only I must observe, that the common people conceive those quantities under no other notions but from the relation they bear to sensible objects. And thence arise certain prejudices, for the removing of which it will be convenient to distinguish them into absolute and relative, true and apparent, mathematical and common. . . .
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> Absolute space in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. Relative space is some movable dimension or measure of the absolute spaces; which our senses determine by its position to bodies; and which is commonly taken for immovable space.[8]

What is striking here is the uncanny (and unintentional) way that Newton prophesies the usurpation of the common "sensible" view of space by his own view of an absolute, immovable system. Relative space, he notes, "is commonly taken for immovable space"; the "movable dimension" of our local experience is abstracted from sensation, and from time, and rendered absolute and immovable.

We do not have to invoke modern physics to find an alternative to Newton's conception of space. Leibniz's definition, "*spatium est ordo coexistendi*" ("space is an order of coexistent data"), though it lost out to Newton's in the solution of certain eighteenth-century experimental problems, has proved durable enough to draw the interest of modern science, and seems more congenial to our intuitive, premetaphysical imaginings.[9] More precisely, from the standpoint of poetics, all theories of space are equally metaphoric, equally fictive, even those which make the supremely fictional claim to absolute authority. Leibniz's notion seems useful because its spatial conceptions are both relational and kinematic, allowing for multiple orders of data in complex relationships, and it refuses to abstract itself from the temporal modality. If we combine Leibniz's model of physical space with a psychological model, such as Kant's idea of space as a mode of intuition, then we have at least identified the philosophical tradition in which a poetics of space ought to be situated.[10]

8. *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles,* ed. Florian Cajori (Berkeley, 1934), p. 6.

9. Leibniz's definition appears in his *Initia rerum metaphysica,* quoted in Jammer's *Concepts of Space,* p. 4.

10. Among the enormous literature on the philosophical issues of time and space, the following books are particularly useful: Adolf Grunbaum, *Philosophical Problems of Space and Time* (New York, 1963); Hans Reichenbach, *The Philosophy of Space and Time,* trans.

It might seem at first glance that Leibniz's key terms, "order" and "coexistent," tend to reintroduce the element of wholistic simultaneity to spatial form. But nothing in the definition requires that this simultaneity be directly experienced. If we examine our experience of such unquestionably literal spatial forms as paintings, statues, buildings, and landscape gardens, we readily acknowledge that it takes time to experience and "decode" them, that we never apprehend space apart from time and movement.[11] Even if we freeze a single frame from a moving cinematic sequence, the single arrested image is one over which our eye and mind must *move*. In the case of reading, this movement is more strictly prescribed, following (with a considerable range of leaping forward and backward) the linear track of the script. And this "track," it must be insisted, is literally a spatial form, and only metaphorically a temporal one. I know before I open a book that all the words are already there and that the text is therefore a spatial form in Leibniz's sense. This coexistent order may or may not be amenable to a sense of temporal sequence and continuity. The reading experience may produce in us the sense that no real time is passing, that we are in an eternally timeless realm where everything occurs simultaneously. Or it may produce the illusion of temporal sequence, with distinct stages like beginning, middle, and end. What we need to keep in view is the fact that both of these experiences rise out of our decoding of a spatial form (the text), and both involve a sense that time has a pattern or structure, however various those structures might be.[12]

The argument, then, that literature differs from the plastic arts by its "reading time" and by its presentation of narrative or fictive time crumbles on any close inspection. The parallel claim that spatial forms are static, closed systems which can be completely apprehended in zero time is similarly fallacious. We cannot experience a spatial form except in time; we cannot talk about our temporal experience without invoking spatial measures. Instead of viewing space and time as antithetical modalities, we ought to treat their relationship as one of complex interaction, interdependence, and interpenetration. The traditional comparison of space and time to body and soul seems worth keeping in mind for it expresses in a concise way the main elements of our experience of both

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Maria Reichenbach and John Freund (New York, 1957); J. J. C. Smart, *Problems of Space and Time* (New York, 1964); and Richard Swinburne, *Space and Time* (London, 1968).

11. For an elaboration of this point, see Etienne Souriau, "Time in the Plastic Arts," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7 (June 1949).

12. One consequence of a general theory of literary space, then, is that the useful aspect of Frank's distinctions may be preserved and reformulated in more precise ways. Instead of lumping together all modernist works that defy ordinary plot, story, and style under the notion of antitemporal space, we can try to sort out the wide variety of ways that time may be organized and represented through spatial form in literary works.

modalities. Space is the body of time, the form or image that gives us an intuition of something that is not directly perceivable but which permeates all that we apprehend. Time is the soul of space, the invisible entity which animates the field of our experience.[13]

The tendency of spatial thinking to creep into the work of even the most resolutely "temporal" critic is seen in J. Hillis Miller's attack on spatial form in *The Form of Victorian Fiction:*

> Temporality . . . is therefore constitutive for fiction in a way that it can never be for the epic or for literature of the ages of belief in an independently existing eternal realm.
>
> If this is true, one may identify a further damaging distortion introduced into the criticism of fiction by the concept of spatial form. A spatial structure is easiest to think of as an assemblage of elements, each with its separate meaning, all arranged in a fixed pattern to establish a total significance. This conception of form falsifies the actual mode of existence of a novel, the way in which it is a temporal structure constantly creating its own meaning.[14]

We might note first that Miller would evidently have no objection to applying spatial concepts of form to works written during the "ages of belief" when presumably everyone (Petronius? Montaigne? Cervantes?) had a simple, unproblematic faith in an "independently existing eternal realm." Assuming, then, that we have won back for spatiality pre-eighteenth-century literature (and *all* poetry and drama, one supposes, since "temporality" is only "constitutive for fiction"), can we make any further inroads? It is clear from Miller's characterization of spatial form that he regards it as fixed, static, and closed, in contrast to temporality, which is none of these things. If spatial form were the way Miller describes it, however, he would never be able to walk across the street or read a paragraph. All the flow and movement that he celebrates in fiction is inconceivable without a space in which, *as* which, to experience it. Miller's final phrase reveals the inescapable spatiality of our thoughts about time: he must speak of a "temporal *structure* constantly creating its own meaning" (italics mine). When he goes on to develop this structure in terms of a musical analogy, the game is blown wide open, as will

13. This comparison is most systematically developed by the apologists for Renaissance emblem literature, who regarded the verbal and pictorial aspects of their books as ways of uniting spirit and body, time and space, intellect and sensation. See Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery,* 2 vols. (London, 1939), 1:155 ff., and Jean Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts* (Chicago, 1958), pp. 94–96, for classic treatments of this matter. The whole debate over spatial form, I suspect, ultimately derives from the debate over the claims of spirit and matter and word and image in these early aesthetic treatises.

14. J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1968), p. 46.

become evident if one underscores the spatial images in the ensuing passage:

> music provides a useful analogy for this *aspect* of fictional *form.* While a *piece* of music is going on the *pattern of the whole* in its incompleteness is *held out in the open.* A constantly changing rhythm of references and cross-references is sustained in living movement, each new movement of the music constituting itself as the *center of the whole,* or, rather, since the *form* is not yet finished, constituting itself as the failure of any moment to be the perfect *center,* the *point* around which the *whole* can organize itself in a complete *circular pattern.*[15]

Miller seems to have realized in midsentence that he was falling back into the rhetoric of spatiality ("center of the whole") and tried to save his case by treating his incipient spatial form as "not yet finished," the "failure" to become "a complete circular pattern." But this adjustment does not deny the pertinence of spatial form; it only suggests that a fragmentary, incomplete, and mobile spatial form is the proper image to contemplate in relation to Victorian fiction. The musical analogy mustered in the name of temporality falls back into the realm of space, a result that would become increasingly clear if the analogy were pursued systematically into the textual and aural experience of music, where "high," "low," "long," "short," and the whole vertical-horizontal structure of musical notation give spatial form to a temporal art.[16]

Everything points to the conclusion, then, that spatial form is no casual metaphor but an essential feature of the interpretation and experience of literature; this conclusion could be dismissed as "true but trivial" if it were not for the fact that so much ink has been spilled to prove that spatiality exists nowhere in literature or only at certain times and places which the critic wants to praise or blame. Frank's essay on this subject was seminal because he refused to make spatial form the grounds of any value judgment; he simply tried to examine a peculiar phenomenon that seemed to link a number of writers at stylistic, formal, and thematic levels. The next step is to attempt a synthetic overview of spatiality in literature, sorting out those aspects of literary experience which insist on being regarded in spatial terms and submitting those terms to an analysis informed by wide acquaintance with the space-time nexus in other arts and sciences. We should not rest content with the observation

15. Ibid., p. 47; italics mine.

16. The application of spatial form to music has in fact been systematically explored by Edward A. Lippman in "Music and Space" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1952). For more recent work in this area see Robert P. Morgan's "Spatial Form in Ives," in *An Ives Celebration,* ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Vivian Perlis (Urbana, Ill., 1976), and his essay in the present issue.

that some works have spatial form but should seek a precise understanding of the ways in which spatiality occurs and of the ways in which it relates to other aspects of literary art.

We might begin with an inventory of the terms in normal critical discourse which imply spatial imagery. Clearly the entire vocabulary of formalism is riddled with spatial concerns, from the central notions of form, structure, plot, and imagery to the more special arguments for the existence of verbal "icons." If space were constructed by vision alone we might suspect that literary space is defined by what Northrop Frye calls "opsis," "the spectacular or visible aspect of drama; the ideally visible or pictorial aspect of other literature."[17] But we also construct space through other senses, such as touch, and embody this dimension in the implicitly tactile metaphor of a "text" (literally, that which is woven; web, texture), hardly a casual metaphor for the reader of braille. From a spatial perspective, all the iconoclastic attempts to go "beyond formalism" and "deconstruct" literary form are not denials of spatiality but affirmations of new, more complex, mobile, or open spatial forms, such as those which J. Hillis Miller finds himself invoking when he compares fiction to music. A sign of the covert amity between iconoclasts and iconophiles on the issue of spatial form is the ubiquity of the word "vision" in the vocabularies of critics of all persuasions in the last twenty years. This term has become popular, I suspect, because it allows us to employ a wide range of spatial metaphors without succumbing to the widely feared threat of "reifying" the literary work.[18] The rhetoric of vision has the advantage of uniting a moral, prophetic stance (that of the visionary or seer) with the scientific, philosophical language of perception and epistemology, and it focuses attention on the process by which spatial form is created and perceived, rather than objectifying that form.

There is a whole class of terms in our critical lexicon formed by

17. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1957), p. 367.

18. See Earl Miner, "That Literature Is a Kind of Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1976): 511–12, for an exemplary attack on "reified notions of literature," including spatial form. Miner sees "a chief benefit of cognitive criticism" as "depreciation of those concepts" which stress the objectivity, autonomy, or substantiality of the text. It is difficult for me to see any benefit in the depreciation of these useful and hard-won concepts, except in their most naive, debased forms. No one seriously argues that a poem is *nothing but* its physical existence as a text, or an aggregate of words, but neither should we utterly detach the ontology of literature from its material incarnation. A more curious feature of Miner's quarrel with the concept of literary space is its occurence in an essay which tries to ground literary cognition in the hemispheric theory of the brain. This theory links the verbal, propositional aspect of literature with the left hemisphere and links wholes, spatial elements, and metaphor with the right hemisphere (see Miner, p. 504). It would seem that the nonpropositional aspect of literature would be grounded in the activity of the right hemisphere and that Miner's cognitive theory would provide a physiological basis for the reality of spatial form in literature, not grounds for its depreciation.

migrations back and forth between literature and the visual arts: imitation, representation, expression, and style are four that spring immediately to mind, but a case could be made for concepts such as perspective, background and foreground, the picturesque, local color, and so forth.[19] Some terms seem to change sides in ways that reflect large cultural transformations: the sublime, for instance, begins as the name for a kind of rhetoric, becomes the label for a certain kind of landscape in nature and art, and maintains throughout its history a link with prevailing assumptions about psychology so that the Longinian and Romantic sublime can, in retrospect, be illuminated by the concept of Freudian sublimation.[20]

One term whose history illustrates not only the transactions of verbal-visual and temporal-spatial patterning but also the reversibility of literal-metaphoric distinctions is that of "rhythm." We generally suppose that this term applies literally to temporal phenomena such as speech and music and is a mere metaphor when used in discussions of sculpture, painting, or architecture. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this primarily temporal notion of rhythm was sustained by the derivation of ῥνθμοζ (rhythmos) from ῥέω (rheō), with the associated images of "flow" and "repetition."[21] Modern studies of the term in the earliest Greek texts have suggested, however, that it is derived from the root ερυ- (ery), which suggests the action of "drawing" (cf. the German "*ziehen*") and which plays on the same double meaning as do "draw" and "drawing" in English. "Rhythmos" was based, then, in the physical act of drawing, inscribing, and engraving and was used to mean something like "form," "shape," or "pattern." J. J. Pollitt suggests that the transference of the term to temporal arts occurred in descriptions of the dance:

> ῥυθμοί were originally the "positions" that the human body was made to assume in the course of a dance, in other words the patterns or *schemata* that the body made. In the course of a dance certain obvious patterns or positions, like the raising or lowering of a foot, were naturally repeated, thus marking intervals in the dance. Since music and singing were synchronized with dancing, the recurrent positions taken by the dancer in the course of his

19. Each of these terms, of course, undergoes fundamental changes in meaning when it moves from one discipline to another. I am not proposing their reduction to simple equivalences but rather the systematic analysis of their transformations in intellectual history and in their application to different art forms. For an excellent example of such an analysis, see Claudio Guillen's "On the Concept and Metaphor of Perspective," in *Comparatists at Work,* ed. Stephen Nichols and Richard Vowles (Waltham, Mass., 1968), pp. 28–90.

20. The basic study of "sublime" in eighteenth-century critical theory is Samuel Holt Monk's *The Sublime* (New York, 1935). See also Walter J. Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, Ill., 1957).

21. The following discussion of rhythm is drawn largely from J. J. Pollitt's *The Ancient View of Greek Art* (New Haven, Conn., 1974), pp. 133–43.

> movements also marked distinct intervals in the music. . . . This explains why the basic component of music and poetry was called a πούς, "foot."[22]

It also explains why early art historians like Winckelmann felt that the metaphoric application of rhythm to the plastic arts was somehow justified. In retrospect it can be seen as a literal application of the term, but one which derived its critical energy from an apparent transgression of the boundaries between space and time. The metaphoric "trespass" turns out to have been a lawful reclamation of lost territory.

Such transgressions, and the hidden laws which they violate and/or confirm, seem absolutely fundamental to the theory and practice of literary history. We are all familiar with the use of labels for period styles (baroque, mannerist, rococo, Gothic, Romantic), many of which originate as derogatory terms in art history and wind up serving as fundamental concepts in literary history. The formulaic recital of apologies and disclaimers which always accompanies the introduction of these terms into a critical discussion betrays our unease with their unsystematic nature and our inability to avoid bringing them up. I make no brief here for adopting all the facile analogies between the arts based on reductive applications of period terminology. But it does seem that we are faced with a crucial choice in the use of these terms. We can continue complaining about illegitimate analogies and transferences from one art form to another and continue to apologize for the ad hoc nature of some of the key terms in the historical and critical study of literature, or we can accept these "contaminations" as an inescapable part of literature and the languages of criticism and work for a systematic understanding of the ways in which the infections are carried.

If we turn our attention from the seemingly hopeless tangle of spatial metaphors which riddle the languages of criticism and focus our attention on that problematic object, "the work itself," we note that spatial metaphors intrude at the outset. The ontology of the work, either as a unique object (the autonomous icon of formalism) or as a member of a class (the concentrically arrayed "backgrounds" of contextualism) is elucidated by regarding it as an object in an appropriate field of relationships.[23] A closer look at this curious object inevitably reveals it as a complex field of internal relationships, the most common of which is the phenomenon of stratification, or what is usually called "levels" in litera-

22. Pollitt (pp. 138–39) is here summarizing the analysis of *rhythmos* by Eugen Petersen, "Rhythmus," *Abbandlungen der Kön. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Klasse,* N.F. 16 (1917): 1–104.

23. Probably the best-known use of spatial form in this sense is T. S. Eliot's concept of "tradition" as a timeless order of works whose structure is altered slightly by the creation of each new significant work. See "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays* (London, 1932).

ture. We usually discern at least two levels in any literary work, labeled by such binary oppositions as literal and figurative, or explicit and implicit, but there seems to be a tendency to want more strata than this as a way of fulfilling some hierarchical model of inclusiveness, importance, or ideality. We never read a poem merely at the (low) literal level but work for a "higher" criticism that engages a more sublime, rarefied, or valuable aspect of the work. If an archaeological image is lurking in the background, our hierarchy of strata may move in the other direction, taking us "deeper" beneath the surface of the work to its hidden core where the most profound meanings reside. It seems clear that we can construct (and do in fact employ) a wide variety of multiple-level models of literature based on implicit conceptual-spatial hierarchies and that the terminology of levels is vulgar and debased only insofar as it is employed without self-consciousness, as if every literary work had the same system of levels placed there by the author without any help from his reader. Our sense that literature, like consciousness itself, is a complex structure with multiple dimensions, aspects, or strata needs to be explicated in conjunction with our perception of these forms in any particular work.

One of the most enduring stratifications of literary experience has been the four-level system of medieval allegory, a structure which is given new life by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*. If we adopt this system as a heuristic device for discriminating varieties of spatial form in literature, we note that the literal level, the physical existence of the text itself, is unquestionably a spatial form in the most nonmetaphoric sense. The physical text is an "order of coexistent data," and the reading process is a conventional procedure for transforming this spatial form into a temporal one. This procedure varies with the syntactic conventions peculiar to each language and with the nature of its verbal signs (literature in a pictographic script like Chinese highlights the experience of spatial, pictorial form at the primary level of deciphering, while phonetic alphabets tend to "background" the spatial dimension, bringing it to the fore only in special experiments like concrete poetry). The spatiality of English texts as physical objects is normally backgrounded, but that does not negate the significance of this aspect of their existence. What might we learn, for instance, about the history of Chaucer's reception if we paid more attention to the development of typography in Chaucerian texts printed from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century? How do the physical details of publication (style of type, size of page, locations of glosses, presence or absence of illustrations, even texture of paper) reflect the cultural status of the text, and how do they affect the reader's experience?[24] The postulate of literal or physical spatiality encourages us

24. These questions are raised and answered in very interesting ways by Alice Miskimin in "The Illustrated Eighteenth-Century Chaucer," *Modern Philology* 77 (August 1979): 26–55. A wealth of material on this aspect of literary space may be found in *The Journal of Typographic Research* (recently renamed *Visible Language*), which publishes articles

to view every text in terms like those we apply to concrete poetry. With poets like Herbert or Blake, this postulate will lead us to reconstruct intentions, since each poet has exerted considerable control over the physical space of his work; with novelists, on the other hand, intentionality will generally recede from view, and other matters (such as the economics or technology of production and marketing) will emerge. These are not, it should be noted, startlingly novel questions but part of normal critical procedure. What is not usually observed is that this sort of inquiry into the physical spatiality of texts may be related to a host of other spatial dimensions in literature and that these particular questions might be better posed in the framework of a general theory of literary spatiality.

If some version of spatial form is undeniably an aspect of the literal level of literature, it is more obviously a crucial element of what Frye calls the "descriptive" phase, in which we attend to the world which is represented, imitated, or signified in a work. Now this is clearly a spatial realm that has to be constructed mentally during or after the temporal experience of reading the text, but it is none the less spatial for being a mental construct. The world of "real" space, as perceptual psychologists have shown, is also inseparable from mental constructions and is also revealed to us in time.[25] This is not to say that every literary work presents a fixed, static space as part of its imaginative illusion. The space of a literary work may be enveloped in temporality in the manner of the landscapes described in Wordsworth's "spots of time." It may include an entire image of the cosmos, as in Milton, or confine itself to a tiny region of the English countryside, as in Jane Austen. It may be presented as metamorphic, irrational, heterogeneous, fragmentary, or stable, solid, and reassuring. It may be a crucial aspect of the fiction (as landscape is in Hardy), or it may be negligible, so far into the background that it scarcely draws attention. And it need not be confined to what we normally consider under the rubric of setting; insofar as a work *describes* anything in relation to anything else, it renders an "order of coexistent data," whether that data is comprised of characters, objects, images, sensations, or emotions. Whatever our reading leads us to "see" not simply in the visual sense but in the entire field of perception is part of the field of descriptive space in literary experience.

The third level of spatial features in literature is the one I have already touched on in the problematics of "structure" and "form." I trust it is clear by now that the term "spatial form" is a kind of emphatic

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on concrete and shaped poetry, graphics, typographic design, and language in the visual arts.

25. Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, N.J., 1960) provides the best guide to the intricate play of artifice, convention, and "natural" or "direct" vision in the act of perception.

redundancy and that all notions of form or structure carry spatial connotations.[26] "Temporal form," then, is not the antithesis of spatial form but the term we apply to a temporal experience whose spatial pattern or configuration has been discerned. Any time we feel that we have discovered the principle which governs the order or sequence of presentation in a text, whether it is based in blocks of imagery, plot and story, the development of character or consciousness, historical or thematic concerns—any time we sense a "map" or outline of our temporal movement through the text, we are encountering this third level of spatiality.[27] This is not to argue that any fixed map or other spatial form will finally account for all the details of the text. Our patterns of coherence may be continually frustrated by reversals of expectation and by developments which cannot be reconciled in any larger, embracing pattern.[28] Nevertheless, the search for and momentary imposition of spatial pat-

26. The corollary to this is that all notions of space carry formal connotations, at least in Leibniz's theory. The Newtonian concept of absolute space, by contrast, tends to separate space (which is the absolute, unknowable ground of being) from particular spatial forms.

27. Perhaps the most important spatial metaphor in narrative analysis is imbedded in the notion of "plot," which suggests a cultivated patch of ground or a devious, intricate design. Eric S. Rabkin addresses the problem of "Spatial Form and Plot" (*Critical Inquiry* 4 [Winter 1977]: 253–70) in a way that seems generally to bear out my contention that spatial form is crucial to narrativity. Rabkin argues that "all reading of narrative is both diachronic and synchronic, and . . . all narratives have always played on both perceptual modes" (pp. 253–54). But he reverts to the tendency to see time and space as antithetical modes when he tries to drive a wedge between "story" (the temporal sequence of events or "action" in a narrative) and "plot" (the rearrangement of this sequence by the narrator in his telling) in terms of synchronic versus diachronic experience. Rabkin sees "story" as a spatial form, "a synchronic context" which the reader constructs "to make sense of the words he is reading diachronically." Plot, on the other hand, "is actual only in the diachronic reading" (p. 256). Thus, if a story contains the sequence of events A-B-C-D-E, its plot might present these events in the order D-C-A-B-E (see Rabkin, pp. 255–56, for detailed presentation). The distinction here seems to me better described as the contrast between two spatial forms, both of which refer to temporal arrangements, one defined as a rearrangement or transformation of the other. Plot is *not* "actual only in the diachronic reading"; it is actual as a synchronic order which we can, as Rabkin demonstrates, compare to the synchronic order of the story. It is the recognition of this artful "plotting" or calculated ordering of temporal sequence that gives rise to the spatial metaphor of plot; our normal prejudices would, I suspect, assign the diachronic, temporal dimension to "story," the element which Rabkin sees as synchronic. The real power of the story-plot distinction is that it allows us to make sense of our common feeling in narrative that a double time-order is at work, the order of the telling and the order of the told. Our method of making this sense is to reconstruct the two orders as parallel spatial forms which can be compared. Neither of the two orders, strictly speaking, is "actual" in the diachronic reading; what is actual is a complex, probably unnameable, interaction between two distinct patterns in the virtual space-time of narrative.

28. A witty argument for the formal incoherence of all interesting post-Romantic works is made by James R. Kincaid in "Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (Summer 1977): 781–802.

terns on the temporal flow of literature is a central aspect of reading; the lively, unpredictable "incoherence" which the deconstructionists celebrate loses all its energy and vertiginous terror without patterns of coherence to lull us into security before our inevitable fall.

The fourth level of spatiality in literature is difficult to discuss because it approaches that point where the interpretation of literature (presumably a rational, sequential activity) converges with the experience of it. What does Conrad mean when he tells us that his purpose is to make us *see?* Partly, of course, he means that he wants us to see in our mind's eye the world he presents in his fiction, what is defined here as descriptive spatiality. But presumably he also wants us to see beneath the exotic scenery, the multifarious sensory descriptions, to the fundamental patterns that lie beneath his fictive world. And those patterns are not merely the formal principles which govern the temporal unfolding of his story but the very metaphysics which lies behind a story told about *this* world in *this* particular way. What Conrad wants us to see is much like what we experience when we "see" what someone (or something) means. We are tempted, of course, to label this as the "meaning" of the work and consign it to the cubbyhole where we file "themes" that have been abstracted from literature. But everyone knows that any essay which claimed to state "The Meaning of *Lord Jim*" would be much longer than any abstract statement of the novel's theme and that it would probably conclude with some admission that the meaning still eludes us.

This familiar pattern in literary criticism—the claim that we do, at least for a moment, "see the meaning" of a work, coupled with our inability to state it in a verbal paraphrase—seems to me a phenomenon that rises out of a spatial apprehension of the work as a system for generating meanings. Frye refers to this phenomenon when he suggests that "the word meaning or *dianoia* conveys, or at least preserves, the sense of simultaneity caught by the eye. We *listen to* the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once we 'see' what it means. More exactly, this response is not simply to *the* whole *of* it, but to *a* whole *in* it: we have a vision of meaning or *dianoia* whenever any simultaneous apprehension is possible."[29] We should note

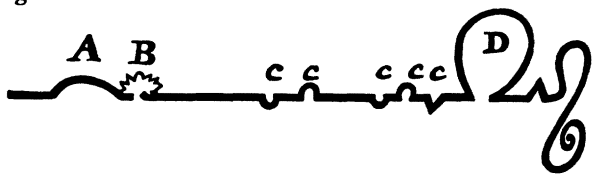
29. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism,* pp. 77–78. The pervasiveness of this assumption in practical criticism is suggested by Stanley Fish's attack on the Milton *Variorum Commentary* for its "assumption that there *is* a sense, that it is embedded or encoded in the text, and that it can be taken in at a single glance. These assumptions are, in order, positivist, holistic, and spatial . . ." (see "Interpreting the *Variorum,*" *Critical Inquiry* 2 [Spring 1976]: 473). Fish is attacking spatial form, of course, because he feels that it causes "the reader's activities to be ignored and devalued" (pp. 473–74). But there is nothing in the concept of spatial form that requires some univocal image to be "embedded" in the text. My point, which I suspect Fish might assent to, is that *readers* participate in the creation of literary space and that the formation and dissolution of spatial forms is a crucial aspect of the reading process, not to be exclusively equated with an interpretive product.

here that Frye explicitly disclaims the idea that he is arguing for a single, fixed spatial pattern as the key to a literary work. On the contrary, he seems to be suggesting at most a structural hypothesis about a work which will explain only a portion of the text (not "*the* whole *of* it," but "*a* whole *in* it"). There is nothing, of course, to require that we wait until the end of a text to formulate this kind of spatial form; I would argue that we begin doing it in the very first sentence as we attempt to guess, before we get there, where the work is going. And nothing requires that this spatial form remain fixed and static; a "vision" of the whole may be one of those valuable but ephemeral flashes of insight, and it may fade with the next rereading—or it may generate rational, falsifiable hypotheses to test against the order of textual particulars.

But surely, it will be objected, all this "spatial form" is merely metaphoric. We don't *really* have diagrams in our heads which somehow correspond to the form or meaning of literary works. This is the point where we must suspend our disbelief if we are to make progress and remind ourselves that every act of knowledge involves a metaphoric leap. If there were spatial forms in works of literature, what would they look like? How could we verify their correspondence to any given text? And what use would they be?

Let us take the easiest question first and, for convenience, restrict ourselves to geometric or abstract linear patterning. It seems obvious that these forms would look like any other geometric pattern; their significance would simply be coordinated with a stipulated aspect of the work to which they are to apply, just as the pure forms of geometry may be employed to refer to anything from electrical circuitry to geographical surveys to purely imaginary, nonreferential constructs. The "map" of a novel might be as unpredictable and irrational as the wildly digressive pattern of *Tristram Shandy* (see Sterne's diagram, fig. 1), or it might be the "right line" of moral rectitude that Sterne promises to follow in his last volume. The fact that Sterne is joking here is, like the "merely metaphoric" nature of spatial form, a device for allowing us to perceive and articulate what cannot be said about literature in other ways. It is clear, moreover, that Sterne understands the stipulative nature of his spatial form: the line can represent not just the progress of narrative time but the moral status of the narrator. The lovely irony of the novel is that Sterne's continuous pose as an honest, "straightforward" narrator who must tell all, including all his difficulties with the techniques of narration, continually prevents him from following the "right line" of straightforward narrative. One aspect of the structure of *Tristram Shandy,* regarded as an abstract spatial form, is that its insistence on a straight line at one level (the "rectitude" of the narrator) must generate an eccentric, digressive line at another level (the unfolding of the narrative).

It is not difficult to think of other stipulated correspondences which are commonly invoked in the implicit geometry of narrative. If a literary work presents a visualizable world, we can often "map out," quite literally, our progress through the verbal form as a track in space, as we do with the road images of *Pilgrim's Progress.* In picaresque fictions where the hero rarely revisits the scene of a past exploit, the spatial and temporal lines described by the narrative will tend to be congruent. Symbolic or allegorical fictions will play off spatial-temporal topography against thematic imagery: a spatial *place* may correspond to a temporal *phase* in the unfolding of an ideational *schema* for the development of a character,

> These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes.——In the fifth volume I have been very good,——the precise line I have described in it being this:
>
> 
>
>
> By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to *Navarre,*——and the indented curve *B.* which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady *Baussiere* and her page,——I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till *John de la Casse's* devils led me the round you see marked D.——for as for *c c c c c* they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared with what men have done,——or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D——they vanish into nothing.
>
> In this last volume I have done better still——for from the end of *Le Fever's* episode, to the beginning of my uncle *Toby's* campaigns,——I have scarce stepped a yard out of my way.
>
> If I mend at this rate, it is not impossible——by the good leave of his grace of *Benevento's* devils——but I may arrive hereafter at the excellency of going on even thus;
>
> ---
>
> which is a line drawn as straight as I could draw it, by a writing-master's ruler, (borrowed for that purpose) turning neither to the right hand or to the left.
>
> This *right line,*——the path-way for Christians to walk in! say divines[2]——
>
> ——The emblem of moral rectitude! says *Cicero*[3]——
>
> FIG. 1.

progress of a civilization, completion of a rhetorical, historical, or metaphysical pattern. In ironic, self-conscious fictions, as noted with Sterne, temporal, spatial, and thematic lines may display sharp incongruencies and disjunctions.

There is no question, then, of using geometry to reduce literary works to some univocal pattern; the idea is to make explicit the patterns we already use in an unsystematic way and to heighten our awareness of the relations between patterns which have different stipulated correspondences.[30] Some patterns will be so simple as to seem self-evident, virtually identical with the genre of a work. One of our most common spatial equivalents for literary action is the image of a wheel whose revolutions mark not just the time-line but the fortunes of the hero. A line descending to "low" fortune or a "fall" of some sort and then reascending is a simple map of comedy and corresponds to the pictorial gestalt of the smile. A line ascending to "high" fortune and then falling is the classic shema of tragedy and the gestalt of the frown. These "smile" and "frown" schemata which link narrative patterns to basic emotional stereotypes linked with comedy and tragedy tell us almost nothing about any particular literary work and serve only as the crudest sort of graphic or iconic equivalent of genre, abstractions of the expressions on the masks which commonly symbolize comedy and tragedy.

More specific spatial forms would display overlapping or intersecting patterns, some referring to principles of movement through the text, some governed by patterns of imagery or ideas that reflect authorial assumptions about world order. We are reminded here of the geometrical and numerological harmonies and symmetries which pervade the structures of art, architecture, music, literature, and cosmology until the eighteenth century.[31] But where do these elaborate spatial forms come from, and what were they for? Are they spontaneous creations of some Platonic reservoir in the human imagination? Or do they represent empirical generalizations, abstracted from the spatial experience of a culture? The classical answer for Western artists has been some version of inspiration: the forms of art are provided by the muses. But the muses are, of course, the Daughters of Memory (Mnemosyne), the mental power which preserves and orders the phenomena of experienced time. This method of ordering is, as Frances Yates has shown, a spatial and visual "art of memory" which was developed by poets and orators to

30. Rabkin provides a good example of multiple patterning when he reduces a simple romance narrative to the synchronic representation of a circle and the diachronic representation of a sinusoidal curve ("Spatial Form in Plot," pp. 261–62). What Rabkin fails to see is that his sinusoidal curve is no less spatial and "synchronic" for being a representation of a temporal element in the narrative. It is simply a *different kind* of spatial form from the circle (which also signifies a temporal aspect in Rabkin's analysis), disclosing a different shape and a different reference in the text.

31. For a recent general discussion of these patterns, see R. G. Peterson, "Critical Calculations: Measure and Symmetry in Literature," *PMLA* 91 (May 1976): 367–74.

memorize their "texts" prior to the invention of writing.[32] As Cicero describes it:

> persons desiring to train this faculty (of memory) must select places and form mental images of the things they wish to remember and store those images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves, and we shall employ the places and images respectively as a wax writing-tablet and the letters written on it.[33]

This connection between mnemotechnics and the construction of mental space survives in the notion that discourse can be seen as an order of "topics" (literally, *τόποι* or "places") in the temporal flow of language. It is significant that the legendary inventor of spatial memory systems, Simonides of Ceos, is also credited with the invention of the *ut pictura poesis* tradition.[34] The pictorial aspect of poetry is not simply its imagery but the patterns of order which allow its storage and retrieval in the mind.

With the proliferation of writing and printing, of course, the utility of spatial mnemotechnics in poetry and oratory is diminished. Yates contends, however, that the systems persist in a sublimated and transformed manner, as forms for the exercise of mystical memory disciplines which link cosmic structures with meditative, aesthetic, and cognitive patterns:

> Dante's *Inferno* could be regarded as a kind of memory system for memorising Hell and its punishments with striking images on orders of places. . . . If one thinks of the poem as based on orders of places in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and as a cosmic order of places in which the spheres of Hell are the spheres of Heaven in reverse, it begins to appear as a summa of similitudes and exempla, ranged in order and set out upon the universe.[35]

It is worth noting at this point that the literary architecture based in the imagery of memory systems does not declare itself univocally as either a quality of the work that is "really there" or as an explanatory, interpretive model. I would argue that it can be seen as serving both functions, and that it illustrates the tendency of spatial form to unite (while preserving the relative distinction between) analytical and experiential aspects of reading.

It is a cliché of historicism that these structures, and the unified

32. Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966).
33. Cicero, *De oratore,* quoted by Yates, p. 2.
34. Yates, p. 28.
35. Ibid., p. 95.

sensibility that they embodied, began to disintegrate sometime between the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century; usually the crisis just happens to occur in the center of the period in which the critic is a specialist. This disintegration used to be described as an abandonment of form in favor of "mere content" or self-expression. Then, when it became evident that Romantic literature did have some sort of form, the change was reformulated as a movement from an eternal, spatial, "closed" sense of form to a historical, temporal, "open" sense of form.[36] Open versus closed may seem a rather slight advance in precision on the categories of formless versus formed, but it at least reflects an awareness that the phenomenon of spatial form is a constant in literary history and that our problem is to describe the history and significance of changes in spatial form, not to assign it to one period, and temporality to another. If we think about the problem further, it seems likely that crude differentiae like open and closed can be made to apply to almost any literary work; if we want to preserve any right to talk about a history of forms in literature, we need to move the whole inquiry to a new level of precision. Instead of contrasting neoclassical and Romantic literature with rhetorical and spatial antitheses, we might study the persistence of certain formal patterns in the arts and inquire into their function and meaning in particular works and artists. The pattern of the spiral, vortex, or serpentine line, for example, crops up everywhere in the plastic arts of the eighteenth century, most notably in the rococo and in the aesthetics of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*.[37] It is also a highly resonant image in nineteenth-century literature and art, from Blake's vortices of vision to the maelstroms and whirlwinds that ravage the landscapes of Turner, Shelley, and Poe. As a preliminary generalization we note that the spiral functions primarily as an ornamental, decorative device on a stable (usually pyramidal or rectangular) structure in the eighteenth century, and that it is often linked with the aesthetics of beauty as variety. In the nineteenth century, on the other hand, the spiral seems to be reserved for moments of catastrophe in which it serves as a structural pattern rather than as a decorative motif, and it is frequently associated with the aesthetics of sublimity. Can we go on to explore the role of this form in literary as well as pictorial space? It certainly functions at the descriptive level of imagery and setting, but can we speak intelligibly of its presence in literary *form*? Are the decorative circumlocutions of periphrasis, like baroque ornamentation in music, to be seen as implicit "curls" or "turns"

36. Peterson (p. 374) repeats a version of the usual historicist line when he suggests that "various theories of nonsymmetrical ('organic') literary form did appear with Romanticism, but they seem to have been successfully realized in only a few cases"; his remark betrays the continued difficulty critics have in thinking of spatial form in open or nonsymmetrical ways.

37. The following discussion of the spiral form is a highly condensed version of an essay now in progress, "Metamorphoses of the Vortex from Rococo to Romanticism."

in rhetorical space? Does the closure of the heroic couplet provide a stable structure for these ornaments, in contrast to the flowing "serpentine" enjambment of the Romantic conversation poem which, in Wordsworth's hands at least, eschews the traditional ornaments and turns of poetic diction? Can we go further and claim with one recent critic that, in contrast to the "continuous field" of modern and eighteenth-century poetry, the characteristic pattern of the nineteenth-century lyric "is the combined circle and sequence, some aspect of the spiral"?[38]

These are not, I hope, merely rhetorical questions devised as covert ways of affirming these propositions without taking responsibility for them. What I would like to affirm is the necessity for developing a systematic way of answering this sort of question, and rescuing this mode of analysis from a loosely analogical and impressionistic methodology. It seems to me at this point that three main elements would emerge in a method of spatial analysis: (1) a consistency of the *stipulated correspondence* between a spatial form and some aspect of a given work; if a line represents story time, reading time, plot sequence, or the fortunes of the hero, it must do so consistently; (2) the spatial forms associated with a work ought to have an *internal origin* in the sense that they arise from a close analysis of the work in its own terms and are not imposed from some alien frame of reference;[39] (3) when comparisons are drawn with spatial forms in other arts, the comparisons ought to be developed in terms of *whole structures* and not in terms of parts chosen because of their isolated similarity. The presence of the spiral form in literary space must, in other words, be defined in terms of the particular aspect of the work to which it refers; it should arise from an analysis of the work in its own frame of reference; and it should be clearly defined as to its function and significance in the whole.

The wholistic emphasis of spatial form should not distract us, however, from the great power of this metaphor at "microscopic" and local levels of literary attention. The study of meter and style, for instance, is based on the assumption that stable patterns (verse designs, recurrent sentence types) govern the temporal stream of language. These patterns

38. James Bunn, "Circle and Sequence in the Conjectural Lyric," *New Literary History* 3 (Spring 1972): 512. On the comparison between spatial, especially rhetorical, figures and rhetoric, see David Summers, "*Maniera* and Movement: The *Figura Serpentinata*," *Art Quarterly* 35 (1972): 269–301.

39. The concept of "internal origin" is, of course, an extremely problematic spatial metaphor which defines reading as a process that goes inside and brings something out (hence, *ex*plication and *ex*egesis). We must remind ourselves, however, that part of what is "internal" to the work is ourselves, exploring the textual labyrinth, playing the game with rules we may have learned in other texts, and with competencies that may or may not be genetically innate. Arguments based on "internal evidence," then, must be accompanied by an examination of the text's assumptions about its own closure and interiority, its sense of relation to "outsides" such as the world, the reader, or other texts.

seem most evident in oral narratives and folk songs which do not have any "literal" spatial form (that is, a text) to stabilize their temporal order. The ballad, as Mark W. Booth observes, is a particularly interesting form for exhibiting the various scope of patterning systems "because it adds together the short-range patterning common to all versification, the long-range patterning of skillful oral construction, and the intermediate range of shapely melody."[40] A familiar problem in logic and terminology arises, however, when these aural-musical patterns are set in oppositional contrast to narrative patterns and used to suggest that the nonliterate person's "mode of apprehension is spatial as well as linear and sequential."[41] We have encountered the same distinction before in many guises: as a generic opposition (the novel is linear in contrast to the spatiality of poetry or drama); as a historical "progression" (nineteenth-century literature is linear and temporal in contrast to modern or eighteenth-century literature which is spatial); as an intrageneric distinction (novels of plot and story are linear while lyric novels are spatial). The final step in this sort of logic would be to claim that literature is distinguished from language in general by its tendency to display aesthetic (that is, spatial) *form,* and "mere" prose, plain speech, and philosophical language is characterized by straightforward (linear) procedures. Aside from the obvious fact that linear forms are themselves spatial, and can no more be contrasted to space than shells can be contrasted to eggs, there is a fundamental problem in stipulated correspondence. Neither linear nor spatial phenomena in literary forms are *literally* spatial; both are ways of organizing time in a coherent image—the first (in discussions of ballad structure) refers to narrative time, the second to musical. What we need, clearly, is a replacement for "spatial" in our system of oppositions. I propose the term "tectonic" to suggest the global, symmetrical, gestalt-like image that is generally associated with so-called spatial effects.

The difference between linear and tectonic could be visualized, then, as something like the difference between a picturesque and a formal garden, the first laid out around a linear, asymmetrical, serpentine structure, the second designed as a symmetrical grid (see fig. 2). It must be insisted, however, that neither of these forms is more spatial (or temporal) than the other but that each provides a distinct set of expe-

40. Mark W. Booth, "The Ballad and the Brain," *Georgia Review* 32 (Summer 1978): 380. Booth connects the presence of spatial patterning in oral literature with the hemispheric theory of the brain, of which I will have more to say shortly. The assumption that "spatial thinking," associated with the nonlinguistic right hemisphere, is somehow the definitive characteristic of primitive, esoteric, and mystical consciousness, is based primarily on popularizers of the hemispheric theory like Julian Jaynes in *Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston, 1976), and Robert Ornstein, *The Psychology of Consciousness* (San Francisco, 1972).

41. Booth (pp. 379 and 383) is quoting with approval here from David Buchan's *The Ballad and the Folk* (London, 1972), p. 53.

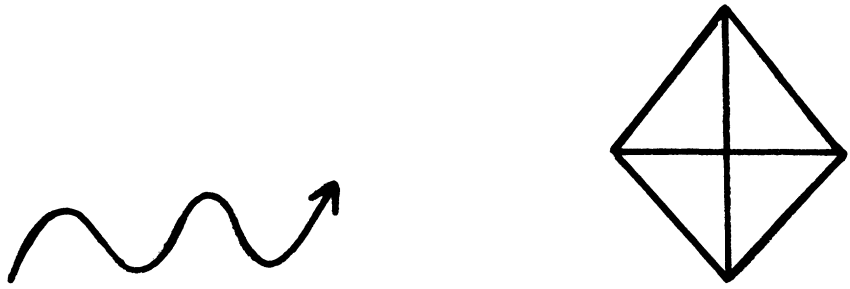


FIG. 2.—"Linear" and "tectonic" images of spatial form.

riential and analytic images for what a physicist would call "space-time." Neither form can claim exclusive rights to the representation of narrative or musical phenomena. Ballad analysts may link the linear form to narrative, the tectonic to musical form, but there is nothing to prevent artists from constructing tectonic narratives accompanied by serial music. Nor is there anything to prevent artful combinations of the two patterns in a single form, a phenomenon which actually occurs in many landscape gardens.

A tendency in some recent studies of literary spatiality has been to link the linear-spatial (that is, linear-tectonic) opposition to the bicameral or hemispheric theory of the brain, and to equate narrative linearity, language, and temporality with the left hemisphere, spatial, pictorial, and atemporal consciousness with the right.[42] The whole hemispheric theory seems to be slightly suspect, however, insofar as it repeats uncritically the temporal-spatial, verbal-visual oppositions that riddle the criticism of the arts. If modern linguistics has taught us anything, it is surely that the notion of "structure" is central to all levels of linguistic competence. And if this essay has had any success, the reader will find it very difficult to detach the notion of structure from that of space. The verbal competence which remains in a person whose right (visual or spatial) hemisphere has been anesthetized is itself dependent on certain kinds of spatial thinking—at a minimum, the ability to recognize and produce proper syntactic order. Experiments which begin with the assumption that the brain and/or mind is divided into watertight compartments will no doubt produce confirmatory "evidence" (just as literary theories based on the same opposition produce evidence). What they will not show is anything very particular about the competencies under examination. A more fruitful line of inquiry is to cut across the grain of these oppositions, to inquire into the linguistic capacities of the right hemisphere, the spatial abilities of the left, and the ability of either side to adapt to functions which a rigidly binary model could not predict. The

42. See Earl Miner and Mark W. Booth for examples mentioned in this essay.

bicameral brain is a misleading metaphor if it suggests two houses of congress that never meet in full session. The proper relation between linguistic and spatial consciousness may be glimpsed in the interplay between Paul Valéry's assertion, "il n'y a pas de géométrie sans langage," and the reply of the mathematician, René Thom, "it is no less true . . . that there is no intelligible language without a geometry, an underlying dynamic whose structurally stable states are formalized by the language."[43]

Our search for literary patterning is not restricted, of course, to the realm of geometry and schematic, diagrammatic models. Blake compared a witticism to a point of light, and Wordsworth regarded his total *oeuvre* as a kind of Gothic cathedral, with *The Prelude* serving as the "antechapel" to *The Recluse,* the main body of the church, and the "minor pieces" serving as "the little cells, oratories and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices."[44] J. Hillis Miller, in an apparent departure from his earlier hostility to spatial criticism, has recently suggested that exhaustive attention to the linear aspect of literature ultimately discloses the text as both the labyrinth and the "clue" or thread which leads us through the labyrinth.[45] We must suspect that the most complex and vividly imagined spatial form in literature is finally the labyrinth of ourselves, what Cary Nelson calls the "theater of [the] flesh" in which "the verbal events of literature are dispersed in the body of the reader," and "verbal space becomes an emblem for the physical structure we inevitably carry with us."[46] At this point, the spatial form of literature becomes the Logos or incarnate word, and the criticism which reveals this form becomes itself a literary, metaphoric creation, like the voice of Blake's Bard, whose poetry depends upon his having *heard* a word and sensed the presence of its living, incarnate form:

> whose ears have heard
> The Holy Word
> That walk'd among the ancient trees

43. Thom, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis,* trans. D. H. Fowler (Reading, Mass., 1975), p. 20.

44. The comparison of the literary *oeuvre* to a cathedral (a metaphor indulged in by the two great poets of memory, Wordsworth and Proust) may be more than casual if the following speculation by Frances Yates has any foundation: "The high Gothic cathedral . . . resembles a scholastic summa in being arranged according to 'a system of homologous parts and parts of parts'. The extraordinary thought now arises that if Thomas Aquinas memorised his own *Summa* through 'corporeal similitudes' disposed on places following the order of its parts, the abstract *Summa* might be corporealised in memory into something like a Gothic cathedral full of images on its ordered places" (*The Art of Memory,* p. 79).

45. Miller, "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (Autumn 1976): 60.

46. Cary Nelson, *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space* (Urbana, Ill., 1973), p. 5.

We have now answered the easy questions. We know what some of the spatial forms of literature might look like, and procedures have been suggested for verifying their presence in a text. We still need to know what use they would be. This brings us to the historical, ethical basis of the attack on spatial form in criticism, the charge that a concern with space occurs at the expense of time, that it alienates us from concrete reality, and that it reifies and objectifies literature in a tyrannical, reductive fashion. I would hope the groundlessness of these charges is now evident.[47] Spatial form, as conceived of in this essay and as tacitly employed in much of our practical criticism, is our basis for making history and temporality intelligible; it abstracts us from reality only insofar as any explanation is necessarily abstracted from that which it explains. And it "reifies" or "objectifies" only in the best and most useful senses, in that it helps us to *see* more vividly and concretely the substance of literary experience and provides us with a core of shareable data on which to test and compare our interpretations. It cannot do everything, of course. It will not tell us what the theme of a work is, or whether to trust a narrator, or what a symbol means. But it may help us to see how a theme is embodied, where a narrator stands in relation to his story, what structure of imagery provides the grounds for symbolic meaning. The contradictory nature of the complaints against spatial form, that it unduly concretizes on the one hand while unduly abstracting on the other, reveals the real power of this metaphor to operate at both the experiential level of literature (the work as "realized" in imaginative reading), and at the analytic level (the work explained and interpreted).

But these literature-centered functions of spatial form, which admittedly do not go one step beyond formalism, are even more interesting when we consider their potential use in comparative studies. The exploration of spatial form in literature has its counterpart in the increasing interest in the visual arts as language systems and in the efforts to construct a general theory of signs which will account not just for literature and the visual arts but for all the codes we use to construct our world. Whether we start from the nominalism of Nelson Goodman, the realism of Rudolf Arnheim, or the subtle and intricate compromises of Ernst Gombrich, we find on all sides a convergence on the problems of language, representation, signification, or, in the most general terms, semiosis. The period of involuted specialization in which disciplines turned in upon themselves seems to be coming to an end. In one sense this whole discourse on spatial form has been an exercise in involution,

47. This is not to deny that a good deal of nonsense can be found marching under the banner of an ill-conceived notion of spatial form or of any other widely used and abused term in our critical vocabulary (cf. deconstruction, vision, structure, rhetoric, *ad nauseam*). I confess to feeling a shudder of doubt when I hear the concept of space employed as a crucial cant term in the "consciousness-tripping" of the seventies (e.g., "getting into one's own space").

an explication of one class of metaphors that pervades normal critical procedure. But it has, I hope, also pointed outward to possible links with other disciplines. There will be a proper dialectical resistance to these linking metaphors. For every Wittgenstein who argues that "a [verbal] proposition is a picture" which "reaches right out" to reality in order to represent "a possible situation in logical space," another will retract or qualify this iconic realism and retreat to a view of signification as an arbitrary, playful activity.[48]

Whether we identify ourselves with synthetic realists or analytic nominalists, one thing seems clear: we will never be able to return to the neat compartmentalization of pictorial and verbal signs under the opposed categories of "natural" versus "artificial" or "imitative" versus "conventional." Instead of regarding pictorial representation as radically distinct from language, we may approach it as a subset of the linguistic system and define it as a language which is incapable of expressing negation or which resists separation of the signifier and signified.[49] These definitions treat picturing as an impoverished language and might be balanced against an approach to language defined in terms of picturing, as Wittgenstein proposed in his early work. The post-structuralist emphasis on language as referential discourse may lead us, as Paul Ricoeur suggests, "to return to the problem of writing as a chapter in a general theory of iconicity."[50] In this wider context, traditionally

48. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London, 1961), p. 39, paragraph 4.021; p. 15, paragraph 2.1511; and p. 17, paragraph 2.202. It is significant that Wittgenstein can be identified with both sides of this central issue in the philosophy of language, espousing a sort of mimetic or iconic formalism in his early work, and a ludic, nominalist view of language in the later *Philosophical Investigations.* Philosophers generally regard his "picture theory of meaning" as one which Wittgenstein abandoned (or should have abandoned) in the later work (see E. Daitz, "The Picture Theory of Meaning," in *Essays in Conceptual Analysis,* ed. Antony Flew [New York, 1966], pp. 53–74). While it seems evident that the earlier theory is more congenial to poetics, especially a poetics of spatial form (which is what Wittgenstein really means by a "picture"), the later view constitutes a kind of permanent friendly opposition that must be taken seriously by aesthetics.

49. Kenneth Burke, for instance, argues that "though idea and image have become merged in the development of language, the negative provides the instrument for splitting them apart. *For the negative is an idea;* there can be no image of it. *But in imagery there is no negative*" (*Language as Symbolic Action* [Berkeley, 1968], pp. 429–30). Burke's argument, however, could be used to demonstrate just the opposite of what he claims here, for the existence of "negative images" seems not only obvious in several senses but results from the inseparability of idea and image, as Burke suggests when he goes on to say that the negativity of a photographic image "derives from our *ideas* of its place in a total purposive process." The only image incapable of expressing negation, it turns out, is what Burke calls "sheer sensory perception," a version of the "innocent eye" gambit that restores the property of negativity to all other images from pictures to percepts (see p. 460 n.6).

50. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1976), p. 40. This emphasis would be reversed by Jacques Derrida, who would no doubt see the problem of iconicity as a chapter in a general theory of writing.

"deviant" or "experimental" phenomena such as emblems, hieroglyphics, pictograms, and concrete poetry may well appear as the anomalies which suggest and require new paradigms for understanding verbal space in general. Any iconic theory of language would, of course, have to confront its natural opponent, a linguistic theory of icons which finds its roots in Panofsky's notion of iconology and in Gombrich's conclusion "that the phrase 'the language of art' is more than a loose metaphor."[51] Such an iconology would explore, among other things, the ways in which temporal form is experienced and understood in the plastic arts at the basic levels of taking in forms, identifying represented objects, inferring movement and narrativity, and "reading" imagery for symbolic content. If every sentence is a picture or spatial form in the mind's multisensory "eye," true reading is visionary (not merely visual) experience. If every picture is a sentence, true vision is not in the innocent or ignorant eye but in the reading of the informed mind.

We must resist, however, the temptation of regarding our field of signs or artistic codes as exhaustively described by a symmetrical opposition between time and space as embodied in verbal and plastic constructs. Literature most naturally seems placed at some median point between music and the visual arts, participating in the former's temporal, aural aspect, in the latter's spatial, visual aspect. Instead of Lessing's strict opposition between literature and the visual arts as pure expressions of temporality and spatiality, we should regard literature and language as the meeting ground of these two modalities, the arena in which rhythm, shape, and articulacy convert babbling into song and speech, doodling into writing and drawing.[52] At the moment, the arbitrary, ludic, anti-iconic aspect of language would seem to have the upper hand in literary criticism, with vision and spatial form treated as "merely metaphoric" aspects of literature. This imbalance cannot persist indefinitely in the face of the mounting evidence that consciousness is not simply a stream of verbal language accompanied by inchoate, formless

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Derrida's renewal of the ancient trope of the world as text necessarily relates the question of spatial form in literature to the transcendental issue of space—"the world as space of inscription" (*Of Grammatology,* p. 44). Derrida's space is, of course, not absolute but a relational "habitation" for the sign systems which structure our world. We can never encounter the mythical "uninhabited world" (cf. Burke's "sheer sensory perception" above, n. 49) but exist in a universe of inscriptions "producing the spatiality of space" (pp. 290–91). This seamless web of traces and signs links "the place of writing . . . to the nature of social space, to the perceptive and dynamic organization of the technical, religious, economic, and other such spaces . . ." (p. 290).

51. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion,* p. 87. See Panofsky's *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, N.Y. 1955), pp. 31–32, for a discussion of iconology and its distinctiveness from iconography.

52. See Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism,* pp. 274–75, for a discussion of "babble" and "doodle" in relation to the more respectable notions of *melos* and *opsis.*

feeling. At least half of our brain is occupied in systematic thinking based in spatial forms that organize consciousness at the level of basic perception (Gestalten), conceptual patterns (Ideas), and poetic structures (Images).[53]

The usefulness of exploring spatial form, then, is inseparable from the usefulness of making intelligible and explicit the underlying patterns of anything we find ourselves doing willy-nilly. We cannot think about literature or anything else without using spatial metaphors, whether they function in "the pragmatic space of physical action, the perceptual space of immediate orientation, the existential space which forms man's stable image of his environment, the cognitive space of the physical world," or "the abstract space of pure logical relations."[54] Even the most abstract argument betrays implicit spatial dimensions the moment it tries to construct a field of relationships among key ideas or terms;[55] the abstract terms themselves are often hidden metaphors or images, as the word "abstract" itself suggests the act of "drawing off" or "removing" a simplified skeleton from a complex, concrete entity. Perhaps our distrust of dialectical arguments stems from our sense that their implicit rhetorical space is too predictably symmetrical, lacking the picturesque surprises and asymmetries that we associate with truthful complexity. For every verbal tick we encounter a corresponding tock, generally signaled by some dead metaphor like "on the other hand."

On the other hand, we cannot live without dialectic, at least at the human level of dialogue. It may be true that there are only two kinds of people in the world, those who believe in binary opposition and those who do not. Whatever the truth is, we need spaces in which to look for it together, forms to unite us beneath the verbal threshold. The great virtue of perceiving spatial form in literature is not that we can hold up a spiral and say, "There it is, *The Iliad* in a nutshell!" The idea is to put the form back into the fiction and see the way it moves and submerges in the texture of the work, and implicitly in the texture of life. It is to see the fiction, like the life it criticizes and represents, as an ecosystem, an or-

53. I refer here again to the hemispheric theory of the brain and its implications for theories of spatial form. For a good introduction to research on the "dual coding hypothesis" and other aspects of the hemispheric theory, see Gillian Cohen, "Visual Imagery in Thought," *New Literary History* 7 (Spring 1976): 513–24.

54. Christian Norberg-Schultz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York, 1971), p. 6.

55. Gombrich suggests the pervasiveness of dialectical space when he remarks that "we always place any concept into a structured matrix . . . the 'semantic space' of which the basic dimensions are 'good and bad,' 'active and passive,' 'strong and weak'" (*Art and Illusion,* p. 371). For an elaboration of the connection between spatial, specifically pictorial, form, and "pre-propositional" conceptual structures on the order of Thomas Kuhn's "paradigms," see Andrew Harrison's "Representation and Conceptual Change," in *Philosophy and the Arts,* Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, vol. 6 (New York, 1973), pp. 106–31.

ganism, a human form, or to glimpse what Gaston Bachelard describes as "the transsubjectivity of the image," a language of vision which may tell us things about ourselves and our poems that words alone cannot touch.[56]

56. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* trans. Maria Jolas (1958; Boston, 1969), p. xv.