

An introduction to place-based analysis of literary texts: concepts and related work in spatial humanities

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Distant  *Reading*

A humanistic definition of place

- Place refers to how people are **aware of/attracted to** a certain piece of space. A place can be seen as space that has a **meaning** (Tuan, 1977)
- Henri Lefebvre (1991), in his theory of space production, talks about the absolute and conceived space leading to a certain **lived space** which is associated to how **people experience space**
- In literary studies, Julia Kröger (2021) argues, through a case study, that **authors describe “lived space”** in their fictional works, they appropriate space somehow
- Studying space in fictional narratives enables to investigate the way authors, through the characters, **experience space and thus define place**.

In geographic information science, places

- are identifiable and these identities are shared
- have locations which can be defined by arbitrary spatial relations, geometrically or linguistically
- belong to spatio-temporal networks
- participate in events

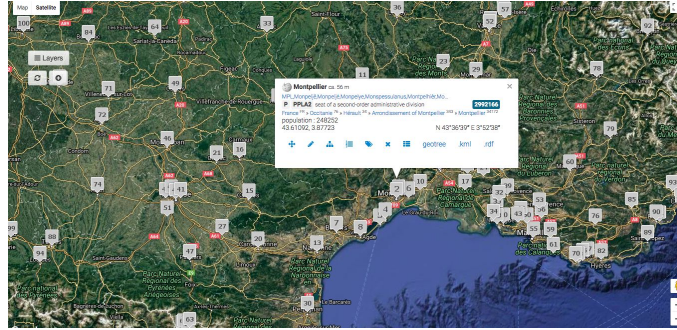
For further details, see **Purves, Winter and Kuhn, 2019**, <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24194>

In geographic information science, places may have several components

- time (snapshot or period)
- location (direct or indirect, spatial relations)
- names (official, vernacular)
- nature (generic terms of place such as “road”, “bridge” are indicators of their function, categories are defined)

The role of digital gazetteers for sharing knowledge about place

geonames.org



Nature/Function

- official, vernacular names
- alternative names
- names in many languages



Hierarchy

Population

Location

identifier

In fictional narratives, places can

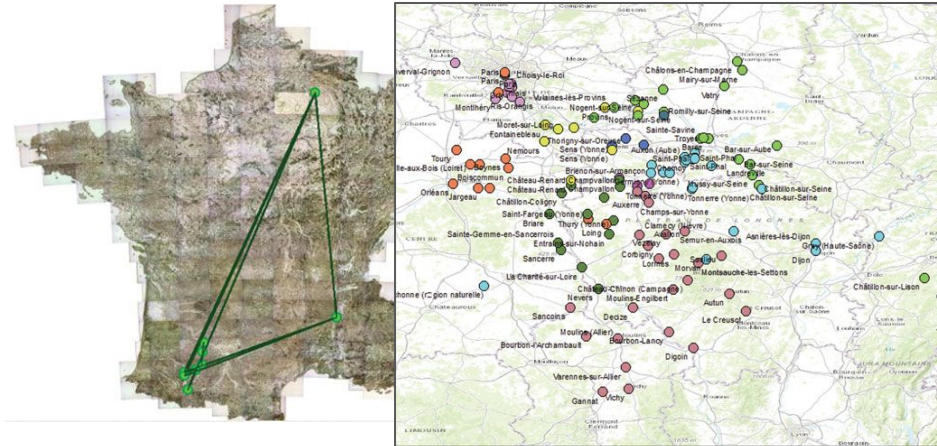
- be :
 - the precise place where the action takes place (a house, a village),
 - an area with several settings (a whole town, a region),
 - the places evoked (in dreams, in memory and according to an aspiration),
 - a spatial itinerary along which the characters move
- include references to real geographical space, as readers and authors are tempted by the possibility of anchoring texts in the real world in some way

Spatial itinerary in text - role of spatial relations

- spatial relations (topological and cardinal) in language for describing indirect location and motion
- case study, an essay, Georges Lefebvre's *La grande peur de 1789* (1932), containing historical names and locations

Excerpt from the South West

“Vers l'Ouest, elle gagna les forêts de Chizé et d'Aulnay, semble-t-il, à moins que celles-ci n'aient constitué un centre d'émotion locale. ... Au Nord, on la trouve à Civray et à Vançais dès le 28, et, le 29, à Lusignan et à Vivonne : elle descendit le Clain, mais expira à Poitiers. ”

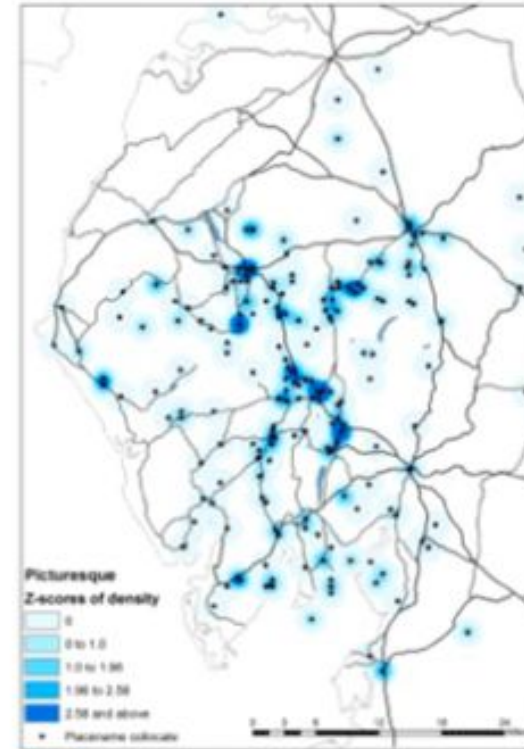
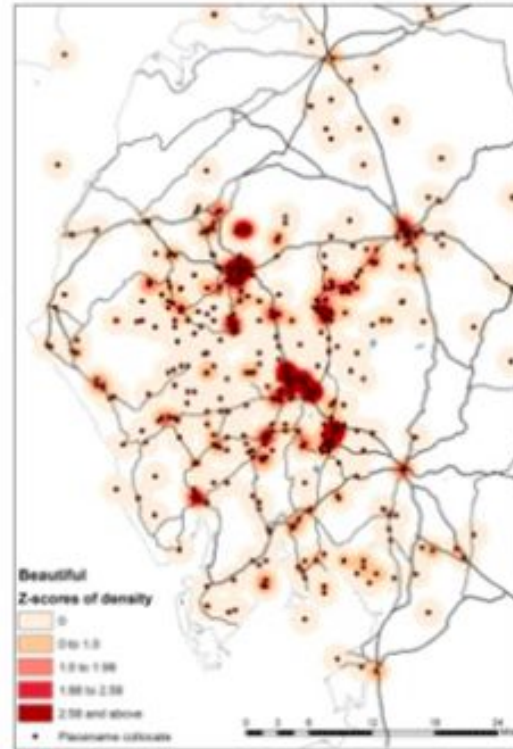


Place in fictional narratives can also be characterised using chronotopes

- As a complement to the geographical map, Mikhaïl Bakhtin's theory (1978) privileges non-referential and relative cartography, where the places cited in text compose a graph
- In a chronotopical analysis of Suau de Varennes' *Mystères de Bruxelles* (1845-1846), which follows as model Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris* (1843), several chronotopes are defined:
 - structural: urban novel, Parisian novel, Brussels novel
 - thematic: posh street, fashionable business, bad neighbourhood to be cleaned up
- The map highlights the opposition between the city, its centre and its periphery, as well as the spatial proximity of social groups in an urban space that is still not very segregated.

Geographical text analysis : Mapping the English Lake District

- GIS and **corpus linguistics**,
- travelogues of two English poets in 1769 and 1802 through the Lake District, this region as all England are described by qualifying adjectives,
- a concordancer allows for the analysis of context of place name in sentences in order to find terms belonging to a lexicon of qualifying adjectives (beautiful, majestic, ..)
- Heat maps are used to represent this information



*Spatial analysis with heat maps : adjectives
in the context of place mentions in text*

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