Theorizing maps with literature

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Abstract
The long superficial engagement of literary scholars with the cartographic lexicon (under the label of literary ‘spatial turn’) has led to a need for a ‘recartographization’ of the field. This tendency, however, still remains primarily embedded within analytical (‘cartography of literature’) or critical (‘critical literary cartography’) approaches, and fails to engage the recent development of post-representational rethinking of maps. Literary criticism, with its creative use of mapping words, and, above all, literary texts, with their involvement of practising maps, should be reconsidered as relevant sources for cartographic theorization and mapping research.

Keywords
cognitive mapping, literary cartography, literary geography, map theory, post-representational cartography

I Introduction
After a long period of laconic existence during which the humanistic geographers’ peculiar interest in literary texts has been partly reoriented in the light of a cultural turn (Brosseau, 2009) and partly overcome by cultural geographers’ interest in other texts (Saunders, 2010), the literary geographic tradition is now reemerging, solicited by the growing ‘spatialization’ of literary studies. The recent resurgence of the debate on the exchange between literary criticism and geographical literary studies (Crang, 2009; Hones, 2008; Kneale, 2009) is symptomatic of a more general resurgence of interplay between geography and the humanities in both the academic and public realms (Daniels et al., 2011; Dear et al., 2011). The emergent arena of geohumanities is strongly connected with the extraordinary growth of new geographical technologies. This is most evident in the field of cartography, which is experiencing a ‘humanistic turn’ (Monmonier, 2007) in connection with a widespread interest in (and direct employment of) cartography within several fields, such as design, communication, literature and art (Cartwright et al., 2009). As for the literary field, indeed, within the wider well-known ‘spatial turn’, an exciting ‘cartographic turn’ now seems to be flourishing.

Yet, in the same way that the interest in spatiality has been viewed not only as a new ‘idiom’ for literary studies (Tally, 2013) but also as a ‘spatial vogue’ (Jarvis, 2005: 1), the interchange between literature and cartography has been accused of being too superficial. The main target of this critique is the metaphorical (vague, ambiguous and vacuous) use of the term ‘mapping’ and, more generally, the abuse of the cartographic lexicon by literary critics (Cooper, 2012; Cuddy-Keane, 2002; Maleval et al., 2012; Ogbon, 2005/2006; Thacker, 2005/2006). It has been noted that, against the popularity of ‘the “m” word’ among critical social theorists

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(including literary critics), this fascination has been followed by ‘little appreciation of how maps work as tools’ (Perkins, 2003: 341).

The field of ‘literary cartography’, indeed, has recently been revealed not only as a terrain for cooperative understanding between geo/cartographers and literary scholars, but also as a contested interdisciplinary arena. Recent articles (by both cartographic and literary scholars) appearing in geo/cartographical journals, in particular, are showing a tendency towards a ‘recartographization’ of the field of literary cartography. As I will show in the review in section II, these interventions provide different paths toward a reinforcement of the role of cartography’s specific competencies, both in technical and conceptual terms, within the interdisciplinary field of literary cartography. However, this recartographization seems to remain embedded within the analytical/technical (‘cartography of literature’) or the critical (‘critical literary cartography’) approaches, failing to engage the ‘post-representational’ perspective which recently arose within cartographic theory.

Map studies, in fact, have been recently vivified by new theoretical approaches that undoubtedly foster a new attitude toward cartography after a long dominance of academic ‘mappophobia’ (Wheeler, 1998) within geographical studies themselves. These last perspectives, which are at the core of the present article, have been defined as ‘post-representational cartography’ (Kitchin, 2010). According to the ‘representational’ approach, maps have been studied and deconstructed as powerful representations with a highly ideological content hidden behind the appearance of self-evidence. This attitude is at the root of the so-called ‘critical cartography’, mainly inspired by Brian Harley’s work. Today’s critical cartography has been relocated from different internal and external points of view. Crampton and Krygier (2006) historicize and revitalize it in the light of the new geospatial technologies; Hanna and Del Casino (2003) highlight the limitations of the deconstructive reading of tourism cartography; Perkins (2003) manifest the frustration deriving from a binary opposition of technical and ideological approaches to mapping; Kitchin and Dodge (2007: 332) address counter-mapping (or the use of maps as counterpower means) as a strategy that fails to challenge the ‘ontological status’ of the map.

The recent conceptual epistemological shift proposed by Kitchin et al. (2009) instead explores the ‘ontogenetic’ nature of cartography, moving from a representational to a processual understanding of mapping. From a post-representational perspective, maps are viewed and researched as contingent, relational, embodied, fluid entities that are performed and manipulated by users in their meanings, as well as in their concrete material consistency. Maps are practices, they proceed from action, rather than being grounded in power. It can also be noted that the term ‘post’ as preferred to ‘non’-representational seems to corroborate most recent attempts to go ‘beyond the binaries’ (Del Casino and Hanna, 2006) of representation/practice, researching the tensions existing between representational and non-representational readings of maps. Non-representational, action-oriented perspectives, in fact, ‘do not deny the importance of representations’; instead, they try ‘to situate them in the flow of a broader process of knowledging including crucial pragmatic dimensions’ (Söderström, 2005: 14).

As the title aims to emphasize, this article’s main goal is to contribute to the current epistemological debate on maps, involving literature as one of the multiple fields that should be creatively engaged in order further to explore, test and discuss current hypotheses on the nature of maps. The intention is not to exploit the literary field to prove a cartographic theoretical position, but rather to engage with literary criticism and literary texts as sources of unexpected ideas, destabilizing suggestions, and epiphanies. I argue that a creative or even a misleading use of the cartographic lexicon by literary
sophisticated epistemology. To illustrate, in section III, I discuss the concept of ‘cognitive mapping’ as it has been treated by literary scholars, suggesting how this discussion may stimulate some confrontation (or conciliation) between cognitive and post-representational cartography.

As a matter of fact, my investigation into this leading concept within the literary spatial turn revealed a series of unforeseen issues surrounding the tensions between different (cognitive, critical, post-representational) theoretical approaches to cartography, providing me with challenging questions to be further scrutinized.

The shift from an ‘essentialist and constructivist cartography’ to an ‘emergent cartography’ (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 342) also has important methodological outcomes (Kitchin et al., 2013). How can we research maps ‘in action’? According to Perkins and Dodge (2009), the wide range of possibilities for studying emergent cartographies includes the analysis of narrative accounts of mapping in published letters, diaries, novels and poems. Thus, another aim of my article is to suggest that literary texts can productively be approached as sites of encounter with, as well as sources for, the observation of emergent cartographies. Section IV is devoted to maps in literature, and proposes to approach map practices emerging from literary texts in a post-representational vein, acknowledging at the same time the problems deriving from the inescapable ‘representational’ nature of literary texts.

Literature is related to cartography in many different ways. Without attempting to provide comprehensive coverage of literary studies on this topic, in section II I contextualize this more recent revival of interest by means of a rapid sketch of the wide range of approaches to literary cartography. The review of recent interventions highlights the existing prevalence of analytical and critical perspectives, showing how some hints to new approaches in map theory are only starting to appear within this field.

This article is meant to further enrich an already vast and multifaceted interdisciplinary field, speaking to geo/cartographers interested in literature to think about maps, but also to literary critics interested in using cartographic theorization to produce literary criticism.

II Literary cartography

1 Maps and literature

What does ‘literary cartography’ mean exactly? To avoid vagueness and shape the field of literary cartography, scholars with geographical or literary backgrounds have attempted to draw overviews of the multiple relations between cartography and literature. In their seminal article (on which I will focus in the final part of this article), Muehrcke and Muehrcke (1974) offered an articulated exploration of ‘maps in literature’. Papotti (2000) researches the ‘liaison dangereuse’ between maps and literature, providing a framework that includes: methodological issues (the graphic map located within the text, the verbal description of maps, the verbal description of space aimed at replacing a concrete map); thematic issues (the evocative functions of maps in connection with peculiar thematic contexts such as war or education); ontological issues (the literary treatment of the truthfulness and falseness of maps); linguistic issues (the creative and metaphorical appropriation of cartographic words). Ryan (2003a) provides a taxonomy of what she calls ‘narrative cartography’. Based on the usage of the word ‘map’ in cognitive science, the taxonomy includes the following categories: maps of ‘real-world’ geographical contexts (spaces of literature production or locations of plots) drawn by literary scholars; maps of the topographic organization of the (real or fictional) ‘textual world’ designed by authors, commissioned to illustrators, added by editors, spontaneously drawn by readers or produced by critics; maps of the (abstract, virtual) ‘textual space’, or database maps, typically made available to readers of hypertexts; maps of the ‘spatial form of the text’
(metaphorical space constituted by the network of internal correspondences), such as the arrangement of themes or characters’ relations in geometrical diagrams drawn by literary scholars; plot-maps, i.e., graphic representations of narrative action in the time-space continuum produced by narratological cartographers; the text itself that looks like a map (see also Haft, 2000).

A number of works have been devoted to particular aspects of the map-literature relationship, addressing, among other issues: the traditional genre of (mainly pictorial) literary maps created for pedagogical and touristic purposes (Bulson, 2007; Hopkins and Buscher, 1999); literary maps produced by critics (Moretti, 1998) or readers (Ryan, 2003b) as tools for spatial understanding of novels; the use of maps by writers during the composition of their novels (Bulson, 2007); the insertion of maps along with texts, directly realized by authors or not (Ljungberg, 2003). Other features of map-literature relationships include: maps as cultural texts involved with literature in the making of national or imperial imaginaries (Klein, 2001); maps and mapping as main themes of a literary work (Westphal, 2011: 61–63); the ways in which cartographic genres and conventions inform spatial description in narrative texts (Sundberg Wall, 2006); the ways in which cartographic products and novels work in concert to shape readers’ perceptions of space (Piper, 2010); the analogy between the practice of writing and the practice of mapping (Turchi, 2004); the idea of the atlas as a novel (Wood, 1987); literary and rhetorical devices used by actual surveyors and mappers (Van Noy, 2003); cartographic language as narrative and the integration of narrative techniques within map design (Wickens Pearce, 2008).

Against this complex background, within the recent revival of literary cartographical studies, and in particular taking into consideration leading geo/cartographic journals, some prevailing tendencies could be outlined. In the following paragraph, I review a number of recent interventions showing how they are mostly restricted to technical or critical approaches.

2 Technical/(metaphorical)/critical, and beyond?

Cartography as an analytical tool for mapping real/fictional literary settings is today animating an expanding field of studies. The ‘geography/cartography of literature’ introduced by Moretti in his seminal book Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900 (1998) still remains a major reference point. Moretti (2005: 3), in fact, explicitly uses maps ‘not as metaphors’ but ‘as analytical tools’. Current analytical interventions, however, refer to this field as ‘nascent’, since they aim to develop present literary cartography by reassessing old-fashioned, handmade literary cartography at the level of current digital cartographic techniques. On this basis, Piatti and Hurni (2011) clearly claim that cartographers now hold a ‘dominant position’ over literary critics. Within this technical context, indeed, cartographic and literary competences are often seen as competing. Significantly, contributing to a recent French collection on cartographie littéraire, Wells (2012: 170, emphasis added) sees in the development of GIS and other visual-spatial techniques applied to literary analyses a means ‘to transform a battlefield into a cooperative interdisciplinary laboratory’.

New mapping technologies have been embraced in order to overcome the limits of traditional literary cartography as well as to overcome the dominance of the quantitative approach in the spatial analysis of literary texts. The aim is to map out qualitative data related to authors’ spatial experiences, thus allowing a critical interpretation of the author-space relationship rather than a mere spatial projection of texts. This is the case of the ‘mood-map’ arranged by Cooper and Gregory (2010) within their ‘Mapping the Lakes’ project. Cooper and Gregory stress that Moretti’s reductive and rigid patterns, once divorced from the primary literary
sources, preclude any phenomenological appreciation of the fluid, embodied and experiential engagement of both authors and readers with the spatiality of literature. At the same time, however, in the development of new mapping and geovisualizing techniques they see promising paths toward a qualitative spatial appreciation of texts.

Alongside this technical line of research, a line explicitly focused on ‘critical literary cartography’ is now growing. This production draws on the Harleian deconstructive approach, aiming to ‘define a literary cartography emerging from critical cartography’ (Bushell, 2012: 150). The ways in which critical cartographers problematize maps as cultural texts stimulates the opening of new perspectives in the interpretation of literary fictional maps, such as those integrated within literary works.

The claim for a more articulated ‘critical literary cartography’ is at the centre of a recent intervention by Cooper (2012). The author follows Cuddy-Keane (2002) and Thacker (2005/2006) in critiquing the process of proliferating the metaphorization occurring with the term ‘mapping’ in literary criticism. The metaphorical drift fails to transform cartographic terms into effective Hermeneutic instruments, producing a ‘decartographization’ of the field. To enhance the impact of cartography on criticism (‘recartographization’), Cooper (2012) proposes developing reader-generated mapping, i.e. (digital) ‘critical maps’ made by literary critics upon analyses of texts (p. 31), on the one hand, and a focus on authorial actual maps included in literary texts, which are to be accurately emplaced by geocritics within their historical, material, social and cultural context following the ‘work of J.B. Harley, Denis Wood and other key critical cartographers’ (pp. 30–31), on the other. The ‘critical’ within the study of the authorial maps is substantial in the application of a critical Harleian reading of those cartographic artifacts (‘critical cartography’ in its proper sense), while the ‘critical’ within the digitalized reader-generated cartography seems to consist of the replacement of a purely metaphorical use of cartographic concepts with a more effective map-making (the use of cartographic tools to produce ‘literary criticism’).

However, since Cooper agrees that Moretti’s approach is based on that positivistic approach to maps from which Harley moves away, it is not clear in his statement that Harley’s theoretical deconstruction of cartography ‘might inform both the analysis of authorial maps and the production of reader-generated mappings’ (Cooper, 2012: 49). This argument should be confronted with the literature that applies Harley’s criticism to GIScience or with the field of ‘critical GIS’ (see Crampton, 2001; Crampton and Krygier, 2006: 16; Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 332), while the combination of technical and critical approaches should take into account what Kitchin and Dodge (2007: 337) have proposed, arguing that the ‘technical’ and the ‘ideological’ can meet if both are thought of as concerning practice. Cooper, then, touches upon the debate over post-representational cartography and the new attention paid to the processual nature of maps and mapping, but does not go further in this direction.

The analytical and the critical are then explicitly combined when an interrogation of the ‘political’ nature of representing narrative locations in map form is posed. For instance, while working on interactive online literary mapping, Mitchell and Stadler (2011: 57–58) acknowledge that these atlases have the power to intervene in the perceptual, ideological, political and practical orientation of audiences.

Some other recent interventions have hinted at the new post-representational approach in map theory. In his recent progress report on ‘narrative cartography’, Caquard (2013: 140) suggests how the narratives embedded in maps may alternatively be authoritative and compelling (being consequently the target of critical cartographers’ deconstruction) or creative and open. To support this last perspective, he passingly addresses the
manifesto for map studies’ launched by Dodge et al. (2009), who claim, as we have seen above, a post-representational approach to mapping practices and cartographic artifacts. Finally, introducing an unstable opposition between maps as ‘storytelling limiter’ and maps as ‘storytelling stimulator’, Caquard seems to situate himself between (or beyond) the ‘binaries’ (Del Casino and Hanna, 2006) of representational/non-representational thought.

To conclude this review, I find symptomatic the fact that in the compilation of their Reader in map studies, Dodge et al. (2011) include the only piece devoted to literary cartography in the ‘Power and Politics of Mapping’ section. The author of the extract, who was sensitive very early to Harley’s thought (Huggan, 1989), is known for his interest in maps as a topos of postcolonial literary texts. Postcolonial literary studies, indeed, are particularly concerned with cartographic debates (Howard, 2010). However, it is worth noting that, while showing how postcolonial writings came to mobilize and creatively revise the colonial map, Huggan (1989: 124) refers to the Deleuzo-Guattarian definition of map as ‘a rhizomatic (‘open’) rather than as a falsely homogeneous (‘closed’) construct’.

Notwithstanding this prevailing emphasis on a (technical and critical) ‘recartographization’ of the field, there are voices which tend to legitimize productive spaces of ambiguity in the use of cartographic tools and concepts within the literary field. Caquard (2011) finds that literary cartography is now characterized by the expansion of GIS and cartographic techniques more generally, on the one hand, and the interest in maps as revelatory of power structures, on the other. Yet, highlighting the ‘torments’ (and the frustrations) of literary cartographers, he finally embraces a ‘mapping perspective instead of a purely cartographic one’: the mapping metaphor, as it is used within the arts and humanities, he suggests, ‘may allow for escaping the torments and anxieties inherent to cartography, and supporting the emergence of more exploratory and hybridized practices and concepts’ (Caquard, 2011: 224).

Going further in this direction, Roberts (2012: 12) has recently stated that ‘there is so much more to say about mapping than is often said in cartographic circles’. This statement is clearly in opposition to the idea that cartographers have to re-appropriate the field of literary cartography. Roberts notes that although the use of the cartographic lexicon (by non-geo/cartographers) has its problems and frustrations... at the same time the semantic ambiguity that has arguably dogged theoretical discourses in recent years presents us with challenges that can enliven and enrich, rather than inhibit, critical understandings of cultures of mapping. (Roberts, 2012: 11)

Many literary scholars, indeed, use cartographic terminology in an evocative or metaphorical manner, thus forging original critical concepts. To take only some recent examples, we might think of Brabon’s (2006) ‘gothic cartography’, Flatley’s (2008) ‘affective mapping’, Ramos’s (2011) ‘global positioning metaphor’, or Naramore Maher’s (2011) ‘environmental deep-map writing’. This creative use of the cartographic lexicon, I believe, provides not only misleading paths, but also paths to fascinating and stimulating openings for specialized map theorists. In the following section, I address the concept of cognitive mapping as a major example of productive, even if sometimes aporetic, confrontation between literary criticism and cartographic theory. I also suggest how this discussion may stimulate some conciliation between cognitive and post-representational cartography.

III Thinking maps with literature

I Literary perspectives on ‘cognitive mapping’

Notwithstanding the current move toward a ‘recartographization’ of literary cartography, we might consider that literary criticism offered
and is still offering an number of stimuli to the problematization of maps and mappings. A clear example is the extension of the concept of ‘cognitive mapping’ to literary studies.

Thirty years ago, Bjornson (1981) introduced an analogy between the mental activity involved in both the generation and the comprehension of literary works and the making of map-like representations by which individuals structure and store their spatial knowledge in the brain. As Ryan (2003b) notes, cognitive mapping, however, became an influential concept among literary scholars only when it was introduced by the literary theorist Fredric Jameson in a 1984 article in *New Left Review*. Developed in a subsequent intervention on Marxism (Jameson, 1988), the concept of cognitive mapping was finally adopted in Jameson’s famous book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). According to Thacker (2005/2006: 57) in his genealogy of ‘geographic [literary] criticism’, Jameson’s use of cognitive mapping, together with the circulation of geographical works on postmodernism such as those of Harvey and Soja, signalled the emergence of the question of spatiality in many fields of the humanities. Jameson, in particular, claimed a new ‘aesthetic of global cognitive mapping’, extrapolating Kevin Lynch’s research on city mental maps to the realm of global social structures. Thought of as an integral part of a ‘socialist political project’ (Jameson, 1991: 416), Jameson’s cognitive mapping aimed to provide the individual subject with ‘some new heightened sense of its place in the global system’ (p. 54), thus preventing the alienating and crippling ‘incapacity to map’ both space and social organization within which the postmodern subject is situated.

Central to Jameson’s (explicitly ambiguous) theorization, however, is the statement that cognitive mapping holds an ‘oxymoronic value’ (p. 416), since it is somehow suspended between the genuine subject-centred phenomenological experience (a ‘situational representation’) and the transcending ‘abstract conceptions of the geographic totality’ (pp. 51–52) (or supra-individual totality of class-structures), thus participating in the ‘enormously complex representational dialectic’ of the postmodern realm. By means of a brief digression on the history of cartography, Jameson associated ‘cognitive mapping’ with both the pre-cartographic naive practices of mapping such as itineraries and the representational codes of modern mapmaking.

First of all, it is worth noting that Jameson’s debatable transposition of the concept of cognitive mapping has met with consideration by geographers themselves. Jameson’s 1984 article is considered by geographers as a milestone (Dear and Flusty, 2002: 7). Dear (2000: 47–69) recognizes the theoretical potential of Jameson’s version of cognitive mapping in facing the challenges of a postmodern hyperspatiality, and Harvey (2001) recalls the Lynch-Jameson connection in his analysis of Balzac’s *History of the Thirteen*. Kitchin and Kneale (2001: 22), in their turn, rely on Jameson’s statements that the literary genre of postmodern science fiction provides ‘a cognitive space through which we can understand the postmodern condition’.

Due in part to its own ambiguity, Jameson’s terminology has frequently been used by literary scholars and cultural theorists to address quite different concerns. Significantly, while critiquing the superficial appropriation of spatial/cartographical vocabulary by literary scholars, Thacker (2005/2006: 61) suggests that metaphorical mapping was perhaps generated by Jameson’s use of cognitive mapping. Jameson’s elusive treatment of the idea of cognitive mapping, indeed, has not led to the suggestion of a clearly defined method of literary analysis (as, for instance, in the case of *The Political Unconscious*). While discussing cognitive mapping, he did not directly make reference to a reading method, nor did he cite postmodern literary texts. Nevertheless, cognitive mapping has been associated with both the practice of literary writing (as in Arnold, 2006; Tally, 1996) and the practice of literary reading (as in Vanacker, 2007/2008).
In his seminal *Geocritics*, Westphal (2011) refers to Jameson’s 1984 article and, by evoking Lynch, calls for a ‘narratological’ reading of real urban space using books as maps. One of the latest comments on Jameson’s cognitive mapping (Tally, 2013: 48) is based on the idea that ‘a sort of cognitive mapping undergirds the project of literary representation itself’: by means of cognitive mapping, the writer maps the world.

2 From literary criticism to map theory

Interestingly, by discussing Jameson’s cognitive mapping, literary critics pose questions that are crucial within the cartographic debate. Tally (1996: 400), for instance, claims that with cognitive mapping there emerges an interrogation about how cartographic practices are inherently liberatory or repressive. Jameson’s project was indeed conceived as a tool for subjects to regain the ‘capacity to act and struggle’ (Jameson, 1991: 54) within the disorienting postmodern hyperspace, and Tally confronts this position with the well-established polemic consideration of mapping as dominating among literary scholars. By demonstrating how Deleuze’s Foucaultian analysis, in particular, refers to spatial practices (and mapping) as strategies of reversible, non-linear power, Tally finally proposes going beyond the binaries of power/resistance. In particular, he contests the association of Foucault with exclusive anti-mapping positions, an argument that is very close to those that emerged within cartographic thinking, namely the limited Harleian application of Foucault to cartography (Crampton, 2001).

Other authors highlight how in Jameson’s formulation mapping is suspended between polarities, such as closeness/openness, totality/partiality and fixity/mobility. According to Mirrlees (2005), the ‘totalizing’ attitude that the postmodern subject needs to regain is not comparable to the practice of employing a privileged bird’s-eye view, since, for Jameson, to ‘totalize’ is to relate and connect; to situate and interpret each object, phenomenon or event in relation to the wider relations and forces, structures and determinations that limit and enable subjects’ sensual and concrete historical existences. While comparing Jameson’s cognitive mapping with a Euclidean, ‘panoptical impulse’ that dominates literary criticism and embracing a different model of textual comprehension based on mobile and corporeal proprioceptive orientation, Ciccricico (2004) recognizes that Jameson actually envisioned his cognitive mapping not only as a form of viewing-from-above, but also as a ‘topological figure’. For Hardt and Weeks (2000), Jameson’s use of the metaphor of mapping is somewhat misleading, since it involves a kind of representation – the map – that is (or is supposed to be) mimetic, stable and definitive, while Jameson’s cognitive mapping, instead, refers to the everyday production of ‘practical knowledges’ that are partial, mobile and open.

These discussions, I believe, disclose various tensions existing within Jameson’s theory as well as within mapping theory: between cultural constraints and subject’s agency, social construction and individual practice, detached visuality and embodied knowledge, social spaces and material spaces, cognitive explanations and representational interpretations, technical approaches and critical positions. Perhaps, though, Jameson’s ability to move the concepts between different levels (spatial, political, cognitive, social, subjective) should be inspiring for the current tendency to find new ways of thinking about maps beyond the binaries of representation/practice, production/consumption, authoring/reading, sociality/corporeality and power/resistance, as Del Casino and Hanna (2006) have suggested.

Some analyses by literary scholars address key questions of this debate. Hegglund (2003: 188–189), for instance, situates Joyce’s reworking of the form of the map beyond the critical binary opposition between an imperial complicity and a revolutionary postcolonial mapping of resistance, stating that since ‘[map] power can be
circulated and rerouted in unpredictable ways... maps are perhaps more fluent than many critics have allowed’. Against what he called an impasse within cultural studies, that is the ambivalent approach to maps as dominant or resistant, Alexander (2007) describes Belfast-based author Ciaran Carson’s writings about the city (where, nonetheless, maps recur in terms of totalizing impositions) as a form of ‘rhizomatic narrative’ based on the model of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic, open map.

Returning to Jameson’s use of cognitive mapping, it is worth noting that it is not the only way in which literature relates to spatial cognition. The relationship between cognitive maps and textuality has been more recently analysed within the field of ‘cognitive narratology’ (see Ryan, 2010). Ryan (2003b: 215) asked a group of readers to draw the topographical layout (a mental model of space) of the literary setting of a literary work. Even if the approach remains confined to a ‘topography of the novel’ (Ryan, 2003b: 218) and literature is reductively considered as a text to be cognitively processed (as in Ferguson and Hegarty, 1994), Ryan’s account of the cartographic efforts of readers turns out to be very interesting with regard to the practice of maps and mapping. Ryan, in fact, states that the multiple, idiosyncratic and creative textual topographies of common readers do not merely represent the storyworld, ‘they also tell their own story – the story of the reader’s reading’ (Ryan, 2003b: 228).

More recently, Hones has provided an exploration of the ‘potential collaboration and frustration in the cross-disciplinary overlap’ between the independent field of narrative theory, characterized by cognitive approaches, and literary geography (Hones, 2011a: 686). Moreover, by stating that a novel is not ‘a representation of geographies’ but ‘a geographical event’, Hones (2011b) calls for a mobilization of literary (mappable) settings: each time a novel ‘happens’, its spatial settings are resituated and contingently practised in a complex web of spatial-temporal interactions between authors, readers, objects and places.

3 Across cognitive/post-representational cartographies

The kind of speculations mentioned above, I argue, should be further explored in order to open alternative directions for thinking maps across different cartographic theoretical ‘domains’. The mentioned discussions coming from literary criticism, for instance, move from a ‘cognitive’ framework, proceed with a problematic confrontation with the critical approach, and seem to embrace a more open consideration of maps and mapping as experienced, contingent and fluid. In particular, it seems to me that they interrogate us about the challenging relationship between cognitive and post-representational cartographic theories.

Cognitive mapping research, which ‘seeks to comprehend how we come to understand spatial relations gained through both primary experience and secondary media (e.g. maps)’ (Kitchin and Freundschu, 2000: 1) is practised above all by psychologists, behavioural geographers and computer and information scientists. Initiated in 1960 by Lynch, in the late 1970s, cognitive mapping research has been criticized by humanistic, cultural and radical geographers for being mechanistic, reductionistic and uncritical. From their perspective, research on spatial cognition fails to acknowledge structures of political and economic power as well as social and cultural contexts within which individuals operate. However, the vital field of contemporary cognitive geographical research now recognizes that ‘mind is embodied and situated’, and that it ‘emerges and functions within a social and cultural context’ (Montello, 2009: 161, 162; see also Hommel and Klippel, 2007). Nowadays, for cognitive geographers, the term ‘cognitive map’ indicates a metaphorical (!) expression rather than a mere equation between spatial knowledge and cartographic maps (i.e. as if
map-like representations were stored in minds). In the late 1990s, together with Blades and Golledge, Kitchin noted that behavioural geography was moving out of the constrictions of cognition to become reactive to the wider social, cultural and economic context in which behaviour occurs (Kitchin et al., 1997: 564). A recent intervention in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (Heft, 2013) aims to extend analysis of the cognitive map beyond environmental cognition research by evaluating the place of culture in environmental psychology.

To what extent, however, is cognitive geographical research, moving from its initial proposition of an ‘alternative to the ‘peopleless’ geographies of spatial science and the excesses of the quantitative revolution’ (Kitchin et al., 1997: 563), now involved, or not involved, within post-representational map thinking? The two fields undoubtedly share the same interest in the subjective experience of maps. As Kitchin and Dodge (2007: 339) put it, ‘each person engaging with a spatial representation beckons a different map into being’.

Yet the notion of cognitive map and the cognitive approach to map use has been criticized as detached from actual instances of spatial actions and map use, and consequently it is challenged by an ethnomethodological approach aimed at researching how maps are socially, locally and contingently practised (Laurier and Brown, 2008). The idea that maps come to life when they are practised in particular settings and situations is crucial for a post-representational approach to cartography. Following Perkins (2009), the recent shift from representation to action opens new theorizations of mapping as ‘performative, emergent, narrated, and affectual’ (p. 127), along with a growing need for empirical investigations of everyday mapping practices. Perkins states that ‘ethnomethodological observation reveals much more at stake than individual cognitive map reading’ (p. 128), even if elsewhere he clarifies that a contextual approach is not better per se than a cognitive approach to map use, but rather that such an approach allows scholars to answer ‘different questions about mapping’ (Perkins, 2008: 150).

I suggest that a deeper exploration of the interconnections between cognitive and post-representational cartography, on the one hand, and literary criticism incorporating cognitive/spatial perspectives, on the other, should open new insights into the understanding of both maps and texts. The appropriation of the ‘m’ word by literary scholars is not only a slippery practice, it can provide map theorists with fresh or disrupting perspectives, cues, anticipations and above all questions.

4 ‘Emergent cartographies’ in literary texts

*a Maps in literature.* If literary critics may have a voice in the cartographic debate, literary texts might be, in their turn, precious sources for map theorists. As Muehrcke and Muehrcke (1974: 317) note in a seminal article, ‘Maps in literature’, ‘writers, as a special group of map users with an imaginative and philosophical perspective on the subject of maps, have much to say to the cartographer’. This essay is a milestone of a specific approach to literary cartography that researches reflections, descriptions and narrations concerning maps as objects and practices within literary texts.

First of all, the authors take into consideration the theoretical-critical insights that writers can provide through the disclosure of the processes by which maps artificially construct reality. As the authors show, providing several examples, literary texts reflect (and play) on: the peculiar visual language of maps; maps as scaled-down, simplified, generalized, abstracted, selected, synchronized versions of reality; the symbolic and metaphorical content of maps; the limits and the intentions of cartographic communication; the multiple functions, contexts and reading practices for which a map is produced; the sense of truth coming from maps; the authority and the power of cartographic representations; the role
of maps in anticipating and conditioning place knowledge. Yet, Muehrcke and Muehrcke’s article is not limited to these ontological aspects of maps. Along with the consideration of cartographic production and products, they explore the mapping practices with which writers, characters or readers are variously involved. From this point of view, the article provides an amount of hints, drawing from literature examples of: maps as ‘generative’ and imaginative entities; the subjective rewriting of cartographic representations; the interiorization and personalization of maps; the projection of sensations and affects on cartographic objects; maps as private universes, storage for memories, fetishes; the animation, dramatization and dramatization of maps; the use of the map as a relational tool, an emotional medium, a link between persons; writing as a way to ‘dwell’ in the cartographic space through the narration of the map. Other aspects emerging from literary treatment of map use in Muehrcke and Muehrcke’s article are: the interaction between the virtual and the material always experienced by map users, how maps replace a corporeal experience of space, and in what ways maps become manipulated, embodied, multisensual objects.

More recently, Sills, a literary scholar specializing in the history of cartography, has claimed that the study of cartography in literature (the references made to maps and mapping within narrative itself), has much to offer to historical cartographic studies. Revisiting the ‘democratization’ of cartography in 18th-century Britain, he highlights how this field has recently moved away from the Foucaultian-Harleian approach (a ‘New Carto-Historicism’) towards more pluralistic understandings of maps as ‘multivalent texts’ (‘post-Harley cartographic histories’) (Sills, 2007).

Significantly, Brown and Laurier (2005) open an influential article on ethnomethodological investigation of map use with a poem by Miroslav Holub titled ‘Brief Thoughts on Maps’, which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1977. As the title suggests, the poem itself is a reflection on the nature and the use of maps.

The young lieutenant of a small Hungarian detachment in the Alps sent a reconnaissance unit onto the icy wasteland. It began to snow immediately, snowed for two days and the unit did not return . . .

But the third day the unit came back. Where had they been? How had they made their way? Yes, they said, we considered ourselves lost and waited for the end. And then one of us found a map in his pocket. That calmed us down. We pitched camp, lasted out the snowstorm and then with the map we discovered our bearings. And here we are.

The lieutenant borrowed this remarkable map and had a good look at it. It was not a map of the Alps but a map of the Pyrenees. (quoted in Brown and Laurier, 2005: 18)

Expressions such as ‘Holub’s poem reminds us that maps are used for much more than merely reading and navigating’ (Brown and Laurier, 2005: 18), ‘explanations grounded in cognition . . . miss the questions raised by Holub’s poem’ (p. 18) or ‘a final point we might take from the poem’ (p. 19), all show how the poem functions as a sort of counterpoint to Brown and Laurier’s argumentation. Literary texts, in fact, may contribute directly or indirectly to the epistemological debate on maps. This particular case reveals that literature is used to support a strong claim for field research on how actual map readers go about reading a map in a concrete setting.

Widening the range of possible applications of a geocritical approach in literary studies, Prieto (2011) points out that a new frontier might be the study of spatial practices rather than of places in literature. He explicitly refers to the field of behavioural geography and suggests focusing the analysis of literary texts, for instance, on the theme of orientation. The literary treatment of orientation, Prieto argues, ‘could contribute to the studies of cognitive scientists, architects, and urban planners’ (p. 24). Literary
texts, therefore, are for Prieto important sources for the understanding of spatial practices and techniques of orientation (like maps).

Introducing a recent Italian collection of essays on maps and literature, Guglielmi and Iacoli (2012) recognize the return of reliance on ‘cartography of literature’, on the one hand, and the persistent need for critically acknowledging the power (or counter-power) embedded in maps, on the other. However, they finally suggest, in a more open perspective, how the subjective nature of maps’ literary treatment makes unpredictable the ways in which maps burst into the literary imagination.

Moving from these suggestions, I argue that the analysis of maps in literature should be confronted with the current theoretical debate and empirical research on post-representational cartographies. This does not mean considering literature instrumentally, namely as a ‘raw material to prove or illustrate various theoretical positions held by the geographer’, an attitude that Sharp (2000: 329) contests to critical geographers’ readings of literary texts; rather, it means to consider, with Brosseau (1995), ‘the novel as a geographer’. Literary texts are here conceived as sites for ‘alternative geographic epistemologies’, and sources with which map thinkers should engage for epistemological insight; from literature, interrogations about geography’s epistemological assumptions can arise, thus producing an impact on geographical knowledge (Brosseau, 2009: 214, 216).

**b Encountering maps along McCarthy’s The Road.**

In light of recent post-representational perspectives on maps, I argue that it is in the literary treatment of everyday banal mapping practices that we find a valid companion to such an approach. *In literature we find maps and map-readers in actions.* Literary repertoires are an immense archive of living maps and emergent mapping practices and should be considered as sources, alongside other cartographic narratives coming from ethnographic fieldwork. Of course, in literary texts we encounter literary representations of maps and map use. As critics, geographers or common readers, we read them in different ways. I do not want to suggest the mere use of fiction as evidence of real-world practices. On the contrary, texts should be researched for their added value: texts provide elicitation of practices that are often mute, put emphasis on neglected aspects of cartographic artifacts and acts, give shape to cartographic emotions in their multiple nuances, and make us feel the processesuality of mapping practices. Analogous to the geo-centred approach of the French ‘geocriticism’ (see Prieto, 2011: 21), I am adopting a sort of ‘cartocriticism’, i.e. a carto-centred mode of analysis within which the traditional tools of literary criticism have a role since they help to reveal the complex relations between the mode of representation and the object of representation, but the ultimate objective is cartography. Literary texts can transform into interesting fictional environments where theoretical reflections on maps can flourish.

To conclude, I will briefly present a case study of the analysis to which a subsequent article will be devoted. In Cormac McCarthy’s acclaimed novel *The Road* (2006), a father and his son are projected against a post-apocalyptic wasteland as a surviving relational unity. With and between them along the road, among the few things that they are allowed to hold, there is a map. ‘Long days. Open country with the ash blowing over the road ... They ate more sparingly. They’d almost nothing left. The boy stood in the road holding the map’ (pp. 214–215). It is one of those road maps that, since the late-1920s, oil companies freely distributed for promotional purposes. This particular kind of map is especially exposed to the ‘representational’ study of maps. The oil company road map, in fact, is an icon of American car culture (Akerman, 2002), a typical cartographic representation imbued with cultural meanings. The road map’s ideological discourse can easily be deconstructed without taking notice of its concrete usage on the ground. In the context of
McCarthy’s dystopian future America, however, this iconic map has lost advertising content, rhetorical strategies and cultural impact to such an extent that its cultural codes are no longer meaningful.

Can I see it on the map?
Yes. Let me get it.

The tattered oil company roadmap had once been taped together but now it was just sorted into leaves and numbered with crayon in the corners for their assembly. He sorted through the limp pages and spread out those that answered to their location . . .

These are our roads, the black lines on the map. The state roads.

Why are they the state roads?
Because they used to belong to the states. What used to be called the states.

(McCarthy, 2006: 42)

The end of the world entails the end of the map. The map is naked, deprived of its commercial and political values; it is a ‘dead cultural artefact’ (Weiss, 2010: 73). Its sense now rests only in its residual practicability. The map reverts from being a cultural icon to an essential device with regard to spatial knowledge. On the map, the father and son simply try to determine their position. The harsh post-apocalyptic environment makes any attempt to read this map as an ideological device aimed at inculcating a consumer culture in map-practitioners seem groundless or even frivolous. It has been noted, in fact, that McCarthy’s novels offer a critique of the map as a source of information and as an authoritarian account of western progress, development and historical ‘containment’, but also that each of these novels use maps to ‘transcend’ this containment (Weiss, 2010: 73–74).

The cultural meaning of the map, thus, tends to be replaced by its pragmatic dimension: the map is reworked, privately re-inscribed (Akerman, 2000) and manipulated in its immaterial as well as material consistency by the father and son.

He found a telephone directory in a filling station and he wrote the name of the town on their map with a pencil. They sat on the curb in front of the building and ate crackers and looked for the town but they couldn’t find it. He sorted through the sections and looked again. Finally he showed the boy. They were some fifty miles west of where he’d thought. He drew stick figures on the map. This is us, he said. The boy traced the route to the sea with his finger. (McCarthy, 2006: 181–182)

McCarthy’s map scenes tend to present individual, dialogic interactions between maps and their practitioners, as well as the transiency of map artifacts: ‘instead of static, written guide, the map becomes a kinetically changing document’ (Weiss, 2010: 70). Maps, in sum, are narrated not as fixed cultural representations but as objects bodily and emotionally performed and as relational practices caught in their spatial and temporal contingency.

You always think we’ve gone further than we have.
He moved his finger. Here then.
More.
Here.
Okay.
He folded up the limp and rotting pages. Okay, he said.

They sat looking out through the trees at the road.

(McCarthy, 2006: 195–196)

In The Road, the map, which is periodically examined, appears in the hands of the father and son during moments of rest, as an intimate medium. Instrumental and cognitive dimensions are overlapped with the affective one. The map becomes one of the many material vehicles for the emotional exchange between the father and son.

The boy nodded. He sat looking at the maps. The man watched him. He thought he knew what that
was about. He’d pored over maps as a child, keeping one finger on the town where he lived. (McCarthy, 2006: 182)

Once it loses its normative, assertive and totalizing character, the map seems to gain a new lease of life as an emotional, relational, lived entity. The overwhelming moments in which the map seems to embrace the father and son together do not speak of an ideological, constraining tool, but rather of a vital practice, an innocent need.

In *The Road* a living cartographic practice can be observed. Its lived dimension is emphasized by the particular fictional context in which it has been imagined by the author and is felt by the reader (especially if he or she is a map scholar). The literary displacement of the road map, from its proper cultural context to a dystopian wasteland, proves to be effective in displacing a firm representational reading of the oil company road map. Thus, I believe that an important task for cartographers collaborating with literary critics should be to explore the ways in which literary texts both encapsulate emergent cartographies and work as sources for the epistemological interrogation of maps.

**IV Conclusion**

This article has aimed to address the field of literary cartography from the point of view of a geographer interested in map theory and literary geography. The recent call for a ‘recartographization’ of the field of literary cartography, which implies the need for a more effective influence of mapping research on literary criticism, has been here partly embraced and partly criticized.

I have suggested that literary cartography remains primarily embedded within analytical (‘cartography of literature’) or critical (‘critical literary cartography’) approaches, and fails to engage the recent development of post-representational approach within cartographic theorization. With this suggestion, I do not want to call for a recartographization informed by a post-representational thinking of maps – e.g., again, map experts to teach something to literary experts. In my view, a crucial strategy to enrich this field of research is to maintain a breathable space of confrontation between map scholars and literary scholars, in which more expert as well as creative, destabilizing or even aporetic ways of thinking about maps are welcome. The analysis of literary debatable use of cognitive mapping has tried to suggest that literary criticism can sometimes provide disrupting perspectives, cues, anticipations and questions to cartographic researchers.

This article, moreover, has aimed to suggest how post-representational perspectives within map studies should be enriched by an investigation of literary texts as fields where living cartographies can be encountered, observed and studied. The fact that the interesting case of McCarthy’s *The Road* was suggested to me by a literary student interested in spatial concerns is symptomatic, and demonstrates how map researchers should profitably collaborate with literary scholars in order to explore literary repertoires as sites of ‘emergent cartographies’.

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