

## Dynamic instances of interaction: The performative function of iconicity in literary texts

Christina Ljungberg

English Seminar, University of Zurich  
Plattenstrasse 47, CH-8032, Zurich, Switzerland  
e-mail: cljung@es.uzh.ch

**Abstract.** According to C. S. Peirce, resemblance or similarity is the basis for the relationship of iconic signs to their dynamical objects. But what is the basis of resemblance or similarity itself and how is the phenomenon of iconicity generated? How does it function in cultural practices and processes by which various forms of signs are generated (say, for example, the cartographical procedures by which maps are drawn, more generally, the diagrammatic ones by which networks of relationships are iconically represented)? To what extent are they themselves *performances* (maps are always both the result of mappings and the impetus for re-mappings)? With examples from texts by Virginia Woolf, W. G. Sebald and Reif Larsen, I will argue that literary texts provide us with unique resources for exploring, among other matters, the performative dimension of iconicity in the complex interaction among icon, index and metaphor as a prerequisite for semiosis, the generation of signs.

One of the most frequently analyzed issues in Virginia Woolf's captivating novel *To the Lighthouse* is what, precisely, the purple form in Lily Briscoe's painting actually means. The question is raised at the beginning of the novel by William Bankes, another character who asks Lily, "What did she wish to indicate with that triangular purple shape, 'just there'?" (Woolf 1992: 58). Sensing Bankes' implicit objection that the purple triangle does not correspond to what he considers any

“human shape”, Lily answers that, although it represents Mrs. Ramsay reading to her son James, she had “made no attempt to likeness”. The purple shape, she says, has painterly grounds and entirely to do with the composition of her painting. Virginia Woolf’s performative<sup>1</sup> staging of personal and aesthetic ideologies which both interrogates and evaluates earlier concepts of literature and art not only produces a new work of art. It also raises questions about fundamental problems of representation which intensely concern the semiotics of resemblance and the relationship between literature and the life-world, and hence, the function of iconicity in literary texts.

But what is the basis of resemblance or similarity itself and how is iconicity generated in literary texts? How does it function in the cultural practices and processes by which signs are generated and inserted into texts? For example, how do maps and other diagrammatic representations work when they are inserted into literary texts? Are not maps themselves *performances*, being always both the result of mappings and an impetus for re-mappings? Looking at the function of iconicity in literary texts by Virginia Woolf, W. G. Sebald and Reif Larsson, I will argue that literary texts offer unique resources for exploring the performative dimensions of iconicity in the complex interaction and dynamic integration of icons, indices and metaphors as a precondition for semiosis, the action of signs.

---

<sup>1</sup> The concept of the performative as developed by J. L. Austin 2003[1962], Judith Butler (1993), Jacques Derrida (1988) and others is that dimension of discourse which generates new ‘realities’. Performative statements are neither true nor false since the reality to which they refer is only created by their being uttered, such as, for example, a judge condemning a murderer to a penalty of prison utters neither a true nor a false statement but creates a reality of the consequences. Likewise, authors of works of literature or a work of art may be said to create performatively. Whatever they present (that is, perform) as real is a reality created by their very presentation. Woolf’s self-reflexive act staging personal and aesthetic concerns is performative in the sense of the so-called *performative hypothesis* according to which “each and every speech act contains an implicit sign of its purpose as a speech act and thus a sign about itself” (Nöth 2009: 89).

## 1. The semiotics of resemblance in literature

According to C. S. Peirce, similarity is a vital part of the general phenomenon of iconic representation. Icons are signs that resemble the object they represent, indices are signs that are causally linked or factually related to their object, for example, in a cause-effect relation (as smoke to fire) or by pointing (“There!”), and symbols are typically conventional or habitual as well as socially “legislated” signs. What is the basis for the relationship of iconic signs to their objects, what is the basis of similarity itself, and how is iconicity generated? According to Peirce, “An *icon* is a sign which refers to the Object it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object exists or not” (EP 2.291), and “An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence, such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line” (CP 2.304). As T. L. Short points out, these two quotations show the extent to which an icon is grounded in its own qualities instead of its relationship to other signs: “Anything that signifies on the ground of its own qualities alone is an icon” (Short 2007: 215). Since the icon is a sign that possesses a quality of its meaning, this can lead to resemblance of it.

This property of being a sign because of qualities which the sign has itself, is what accounts for the self-reflexivity of the iconic sign. Peirce’s concept used to refer to iconicity is “likenesses”: “Most icons, if not all, are *likenesses* of their objects. A photograph is an icon” (EP 2.13), but it is however not only iconic, but because to of its production by optical causality, it is also indexical, since it records light reflected by its object and background. Photographic recording is either done on film or converted to electronic signals in the sensor.<sup>2</sup> The iconic aspect of the photograph, its *likeness*, has to do with

---

<sup>2</sup> The film has a photochemical reaction whereas the digital camera sensor has photodiodes that can react with the photons and convert to electronic signals.

Peirce's division of the icon into what he calls hypoicons, since the "pure icon" can only exist as a possibility:

A possibility alone is an Icon purely by virtue of its quality; and its object can only be a Firstness. But a sign may be *iconic*, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. If a substantive be wanted, an iconic Representamen [or Sign] may be termed a *hypoicon*. Any material image, [such] as a painting, is largely conventional in its mode of representation; but in itself, without legend or label, it may be called a hypoicon. Hypoicons may roughly [be] divided according to the mode of Firstness which they partake. Those which partake the simple qualities, or First Firstnesses, are *images*; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are *diagrams*; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*. (EP 2.274)

As Winfried Nöth argues, in contrast to the pure or "genuine" icon, which is a "mere abstraction", the "*hypoicon* is only similar to its object, and it shares only some of its features with its object" (Nöth 2001: 19). The use of the term 'hypoicon' therefore reminds us that, especially when it comes to iconicity in language, "every verbal icon is not only an icon, but at the same time also a symbol, sometimes also with indexical elements" (*ibid.*). In such hypoicons as likenesses, samples and examples, however, the iconic component is predominant (compare Short 2007: 218). The paint sample is an 'image' of the paint in the can because it simply shares the visual quality of the substance in the container. The map is a 'diagram' example of a territory because the relationships in it are presented as analogous to that arrangement in the territory itself. Metaphors are structurally even more complex than diagrams (see Colapietro 2010; Haley 1988) since the likeness on which they are based is mediated by language.

In contrast to the photograph, which resembles its objects in many shades and details, in the case of a map, the likeness between the sign and its object, its territory, is diagrammatic. A map is 'like' its territory in a more abstract way than pictures. We recognize above all the rela-

tions between the places it represents, not the places themselves, whether these are the forms of buildings, highways or landscapes. The visual aspect of the icon therefore always involves a relationship of resemblance. Pictorial signs are otherwise also indexical, insofar as they are influenced in their shape by the shape of their objects and embodied in some “singular materiality, or in some particular form, or as an *instance* of an iconic representation, and hence, according to these features, are predominantly dicent indexical sinsigns” (Santaella 2001: 19).

However, as Peirce points out above, an icon does not need to refer to some actually existing object — it can be such a thing as a “pencil streak”, which, in our mind, takes on the meaning of “a geometrical line” (CP 2.304) when we consider it as such. In the case of a visual meaning such as “the streak”, it leads to resemblance, but only if that quality is principally visual. The peculiar power of icons lies in their ability to evoke images in our mind, which has been a major topic of research in cognitive studies for the past decades. The cognitive sciences have had much interest in the role of the iconic in concept formation and in communication, which has only increased with the current development in complex multimedia techniques and sophisticated methods of visualization of scientific processes. The focus has been on the importance of mental images in cognitive processes, not only for the way we orient ourselves in the physical world we live in but also for how we outline problems by “mapping them”, describe processes or make decisions by using maps, schemata, and diagrams. Cognition involves iconicity because mental images are icons. Only icons, including mental images, can lead to new insights and to the discovery of relations not recognized without their iconic representation. As Winfrid Nöth (2008: 95) points out,

[a]n icon is superior to other signs because it represents its object more clearly than a symbol or an index; it has the quality of clearness. This is so because it does not only represent its object as a mere otherness but as something whose

structure it conveys simultaneously with its own structure. “Icons [...] have to be used to explain the significations of words, says Peirce”.<sup>3</sup>

Cognitive activities such as reading involve orienting ourselves in the fictional world of literature in which meaning is constructed by the reader who interprets the verbal signs. In this sense, iconicity is generated by the readers as they decipher the signs, in their activity of meaning-making — much like a detective trying to solve a murder case which, even though clues are indexical signs, involves evoking possible scenarios by calling up images, structuring these by putting them in context, and then picturing potential motifs and lines of development by comparing these to similar cases (compare Ljungberg 1999: 13–14). Reading experientially is thus the performance of actively taking part in the dialogue with the text, the performative generation of a fictional world, a mental space in which we are able to move (see Gass 1985: 227; Colapietro 2010: 40).

## **2. The relationship between literary texts and the life-world**

Similarity plays a fundamental role for such cognitive activities. As Dines Johansen argues, literature “mimes and stages, as it were, desires and passions, that is, it invites not only intellectual understanding but empathy” (Johansen 2002: 326). To “iconize” a literary text, he suggests, means to evoke images connected to memories and fantasies that are drive cathected. Johansen discerns three ways of iconizing

---

<sup>3</sup> Peirce gives the following example: “A man walking with a child points his arm up into the air and says, ‘There is a balloon’. The pointing arm is an essential part of the symbol without which the latter would convey no information. But if the child asks, ‘What is a balloon’, and the man replies, ‘It is something like a great big soap bubble’, he makes the image a part of the symbol” (EP 2.274–275, also quoted in Nöth 2008: 95).

texts, namely imaginative iconization or “imaginization”, calling forth mental images generated by different modes of perception and conceived by what is represented; “diagrammatization” or structuring the network or diagram of what is represented in the text, ‘reading for the plot’; or “allegorization”, relating relationships of the text world to other conceptual structures (Johansen 2002: 327). Reading literature thus means “working with two sets of references, one referring to the universe of the text, the other one to the lifeworld and the memories of the reader. The constant intertwining of these two sets of references ends in identification”; it also explains why an exciting text causes real sensory-motor activity (*ibid.*, 329).

The phenomenon of similarity is crucial here. Even if the images evoked by readers from a similar culture will never be identical since we all contribute with our private experiences to the “iconizing” of the text, they will be similar. Subjectivizing it does not mean making it personal and unique but includes “objective” properties and mind sets as well as the cultural imaginary and our species-specific make-up (see Johansen 2002; Ljungberg 2009). A text such as Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* offers an interesting example for an analysis of how these three ways of iconizing affect our reading and understanding of the text.<sup>4</sup> The scene from which the above passage was quoted is played out in front of the Ramsays’ seaside summer house as Lily, the painter, is working at her easel trying to find a way to paint a portrait of Mrs. Ramsay that will ‘capture her’, beneath her surface appearance.

---

<sup>4</sup> Johansen’s concept of iconization demonstrates how intricate the cognitive processes involved in reading are. We “iconize” while reading quite naturally without taking into account that we are performing these processes. The complexity of the hierarchies involved in the reading process was recently pointed out by Oliver Sacks (2010: 27) in an article on alexia, word blindness or visual aphasia, a sudden inability to read that seems to often afflict highly skilled readers. As he says, although we might think of it as a “seamless and indivisible act, and as we read we attend to meaning [...] is in fact, dependent on a whole hierarchy or cascade of processes which can break down at any point”.

Suddenly she sees that Mr. Bankes, another guest, is approaching her and starts to inspect her painting:

Taking out a pen knife, Mr. Bankes tapped the canvas with its bone handle. What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape 'just there'? he asked.

It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to little James, she said. She knew his objections — that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said. For what reason had she introduced them then? He asked. Why indeed? — except that if there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness. Simple, obvious, commonplace, as it was, Mr. Bankes was interested. Mother and child then — objects of universal veneration, and in this case the mother was famous for her beauty — might be reduced, he pondered, to a purple shadow without irreverence.

But the picture was not of them, she said. Or, not in his sense. There were other senses, too, in which one might reverence them. By a shadow here and a light there, for instance. Her tribute took that form, if, as she vaguely supposed, a picture must be a tribute. A mother and child might be reduced to a child without irreverence. A light here required a shadow there. He considered. He was interested. He took it scientifically in completely good faith. (Woolf 1992: 58–59)

What is it that makes this scene so palpable and so easy to evoke? Why do we so sympathize with Lily's frustration at being — however benevolently — criticized by Mr. Bankes? Partly it is the dialogic situation: Virginia Woolf's expert use of free indirect discourse has us enact — and perform — the co-presence of two voices, the narrator's voice and a character's pre-verbal perception or feeling, which immediately draws us into the characters' consciousness and which Mieke Bal (1997: 44ff) calls "embedding". From an imaginizing point of view, the two discourses combine in this passage, first by allowing the reader to enter Lily Briscoe's mind and sympathize with her attempt as an artist not only to make her painting a "tribute" to Mrs. Ramsay but also to do this in an entirely new way, and then to give us Mr. Bankes' reaction. There is a logical order in the discussion between Lily and Mr. Bankes; secondly, Bankes' repetition of purple as

both a “triangular purple shape” and “a purple shadow” draws attention to the colour purple which seems to dominate the painting — colours being, according to C. S. Peirce, examples of the quality of Firstness — despite Bankes’s implicit criticism that Lily’s painting is not a recognizable portrait of Mrs. Ramsay but “[a] light here and a shadow there”. Third, the representation also conforms to the ‘mood’ of the text as it reflects Lily’s insecurity and irritation at having her work judged by someone who clearly has a much more traditional view on art than she does and, therefore, does not understand what she is trying to have her painting achieve. Moreover, although the novel puts such a marked emphasis on vision, imaginization helps staging this scene synaesthetically so that we can both see, hear and feel Lily’s reaction to having her creative, inner world invaded by her environment’s conventionalism.

Where imaginization concerns the evocation of images in reading, diagrammatization helps us see the story or novelistic structure, which reveals the work’s overall concept. *To the Lighthouse* is divided into three parts, of which the first, *The Window*, and the last, *The Lighthouse*, are the longest; they do, however, only represent one single day each, seven years apart. These two parts are joined together by the middle chapter, *Time Passes*, which is very short but into which seven years’ highly dramatic events have been compressed, such as the deaths of both Mrs. Ramsay and her daughter, and numerous World War I casualties, etc. In her foreword to *To the Lighthouse*, Hermione Lee (1992: xiv) points out that Virginia Woolf had the novel’s structure clear before even starting to write. She wanted it to be “All character — not a view of the world” and “Two blocks joined by a corridor”, illustrated by a diagram that she had drawn below (Fig. 1):

All character – not a view of the world.  
 Two blocks joined by a corridor

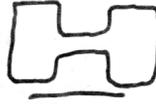


Figure 1. Virginia Woolf's diagram of the narrative structure of *To the Lighthouse* with her two type-written remarks above (Lee 1992: xiv).

Figure 1 shows how diagrammatization does not only deal with relations at the level of language but also with what is generally known in cognitive science and cognitive poetics as image schemata (see Lakoff, Johnson 1999; Freeman 2004; Stockwell 2002; Ljungberg 2004). Image schemata are also at work on a much smaller scale, in the structure of the sentences and utterances represented in the characters' exterior and interior thoughts and actions, which does not only contribute to the novel's polyphony but also corresponds to Woolf's remark that her novel should be "[a]ll character — not a view of the world" (Fig. 1) above. This utterance points to her orchestration of voices by way of free indirect discourse as the prevalent mode of representation, which, in Mieke Bal's (1997: 158) view, is an "embedded focalization" concerned with the relationship between the subject and the object. Such perception is a psychosomatic process which can never be objective as it will always concern a position taken with respect to the perceived object, the fall of the light, the distance, previous knowledge and psychological attitude (Bal 1997: 142). In a sense, each focalization — such as the ones in the passage above — presents a diagram of a character's thoughts and mindset as it communicates his or her aesthetics and cultural attitudes. Moreover, by forcing the reader to engage with these shifts of voice, it performatively shapes the reading experience into a dialogue between reader and text.

The third way to iconize the text, according to Johansen (2002: 327), by allegorizing it, means emphasizing its metaphoric aspects. This means reading it with a second meaning superimposed on its literal sense, such as Christian parables, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* or George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. It would be hard to argue that Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* represents this kind of allegory, yet, to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who takes the novel's particular structure ("Two blocks joined by a corridor") as her point of departure, the novel is an "allegory of a reason menaced by madness, an ontology on the brink of disaster by the near-uncoupling of the copula" (Spivak 1988: 38). This "uncoupling" takes place in the middle section *Time Passes*, which Spivak reads as a "copula" between the two major sections *The Window* and *The Lighthouse*. Spivak describes her deconstructionist reading partly as reading the novel "as the story of Mr. Ramsay (philosopher-theorist) and Lily (artist-practitioner) around Mrs. Ramsay" (Spivak 1988: 31). In her view, the novel maps both Virginia Woolf's and Lily's efforts to "construct the copula, however precarious, of art" in order to "articulate, by using a man as an instrument, a woman's vision of a woman" (Spivak 1988: 45). As the novel has been described as a "lamentation of the loss and grief for powerful, loved, dead parents" (Lee 1992: ix), this seems a fruitful approach. The colour purple in that "triangular purple shape" could then be interpreted in its liturgical sense, as symbolizing the colour of mourning; the triangle as Lily's own relationship as an artist to the intellectual and patriarchal Mr. Ramsay and Mrs. Ramsay as the magnificent Victorian "Angel in the house".<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Lily's use of the prominent "triangular purple shape" to represent Mrs. Ramsay allows a reading of the story as an allegory of

---

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Lily is only able to complete her portrait seven years after Mrs. Ramsay's death: because of her emotional attachment to Mrs. Ramsay she can only do this once she has distanced herself from the loss.

royal and imperial Britain. The colour purple,<sup>6</sup> traditionally associated with emperors and Roman magistrates, would therefore suggest an association with imperial Britain, and by this connotation, the portrait appears as a tribute to the personality of Mrs. Ramsay and her functioning as a centre of domesticity and a protagonist upholding the nation. Such a reading would be supported by Janet Winston's interpretation of the juxtaposition early in the novel of Mrs. Ramsay and Queen Victoria as an allegory about Britain's imperial conquest. As she argues, although "this imperial narrative parallels the feminist tale about a modern woman resisting the Victorian marriage imperative, the stories interconnect and sustain one another" (Winston 2009: 88). This would also explain Lily's difficulties with getting her portrait 'right' since her real artistic ambitions lie elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Iconizing the text is, as Dines Johansen points out, not only necessary to make the text come alive, to stop it from being "black marks on the paper" (Johansen 2002: 338) but it will also be different in different readers. Moreover, as we have seen in the above text passage from *To the Lighthouse*, all three ways of producing 'likenesses' are valid and even necessary for understanding, even though mostly one will be more dominant than the other.

---

<sup>6</sup> The original name of the colour purple is Tyrian purple (Greek *πορφύρα*, *porphyra*, Latin *purpura*). The color, which is also known as 'royal purple,' 'imperial purple' or 'imperial dye,' was the most expensive dye in the ancient world, used by the emperor and Roman magistrates (Stieglitz 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Other allegorical readings include Heidi Stalla's connection between Mr. William Bankes and the historical person by the same name, a famous Egyptologist and explorer, which she sees as linking the patriarchal theme pervading *To the Lighthouse* by connecting it with the Pharaohs and with the "age of exploration, discovery, and imperialism" (Stalla 2008: 22).

### 3. Photographic resemblance in texts

But could one also not apply the framework of iconization to other representations involving visual semiosis? What happens when an actual image such as a photograph is inserted into a text? Although the indexical properties of the photographic sign have often been emphasized (see Dubois 1990; Santaella 1998), most photographs also contain a strong iconic ingredient, since it is the similarity of the photo with the object it depicts that tells us what it actually represents (see Sonesson 1999: 22). As mentioned above, photographs, according to C. S. Peirce — and today we can add, the “instantaneous” ones in particular — function both as indices, because of their “physical connection” with their objects, that is, the photochemical process which makes them correspond “point by point to nature”, and as icons, since they “are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent” (CP 2.281). Their similarity to their object depends on the photochemical process that produces them, and this is what accounts for their being “in certain respects” similar to their objects and not some “mimetic illusion”. At the same time, the relationship of resemblance between a photograph and its object is diagrammatically iconic, in the sense that the spatial relations within the photograph correspond to the physical relations of the object itself. It is this *perceived* similarity to an object that creates a new ‘reality’, an aspect which has become particularly prominent in digital photography, with its ready access to virtual worlds (see Nöth 2003).

In the interaction between a photograph and a written text, both indexical and iconic properties come into play. In particular, the insertion of photographs and photographic viewpoints into narrative puts the focus on the diagrammatic function of iconicity, since it may disclose hidden patterns and features in both narrative and discourse that may not be immediately perceived. I would further argue that the particular character of the medium of photography makes visible fundamental questions of signification that concern all kinds of

representation. This direct link with reality is, of course, due to the fact that the photograph is, by virtue of its indexical relationship with its object, the document *par preference*. As Barthes (2000: 5) reflects, “the photograph is never anything but an antiphon of ‘Look!’, ‘See!’, ‘Here it is!’: it points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this purely deictic language”. As physical traces of actual objects, photographs *seem* much more referential than words. The photograph therefore maintains a special proximity to its referent, the original it is in the process of copying, since it is not “immediately or generally distinguished from [it]” (Sontag 1977: 153–154).

These “miniatures of reality” (Sontag 1977: 4) together with photography’s capacity to make things simultaneously present and absent were probably the reason why Marcel Proust was so fascinated with ‘light-writing’ and showed an excessive interest in possessing portraits of his acquaintances (Brassaï 1997). In addition, Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* can be read as an allegory on the function of memory as it enhances the similarity between photography and the way we construct our lives by interweaving our present with images of the past, which like negatives lie buried in our minds — a myriad of recollected moments, viewpoints and foci that only gain coherence and meaning once they are developed and laid one on top of the other.

That resemblance between ‘authentic’ memories and ‘constructed’ ones is one of the issues at stake in W. G. Sebald’s elegiac novel *Austerlitz* (Sebald 2001a). Sebald’s works appear indeed to be very Proustian, not least because of the documentary touch given by the author’s use of photography, in particular in *The Emigrants* (Sebald 1996) and in his last work, *Austerlitz* (Sebald 2001a). But, as Sebald emphasizes in an interview (Sebald 2001b), these photographs have no ‘authentic’ reference to the text whatsoever — he does not collect photographs systematically but gathers them randomly, from junk shops and archives, tears them from magazines or takes them himself, and then has them altered and manipulated. These images acquire their meaning from being simply placed in a context without captions

and, although they *seem* to function as ‘documentary evidence’ for the text, they in fact generate a new fictional ‘reality’.

*Austerlitz* has 78 photographs of various sizes, without captions and distributed all over the novel’s 298 pages, including one — which is also the cover picture — of a child with a striking resemblance to the author himself, as the unhappy protagonist, dressed up as a cavalier for a masked ball. Other photos present a boys’ football team, an old-fashioned disassembled pocket watch, billiard-balls, moths and butterfly collections, the stage backdrop of Rossini’s *Guglielmo Tell*, details of pompous 19th-century architecture, crumbling buildings, grave yards, photographs from Terezin today (where Austerlitz’s mother was killed as a concentration camp intern during WW II), including a small porcelain horse in a shop window (Fig. 2) or library reading rooms. At first, one reads these captionless pictures through the story provided by Sebald, only to discover that they refer only obliquely to the text. Instead, their fascination lies in their suggestive, evocative character, by virtue of which they create their own space in the story in a way that is “anti-proustian”. As one reviewer points out, referring to the well-known “episode of the madeleine”<sup>8</sup> in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, although Sebald often adopts a 19th-century elegiac stance, “his madeleine is poisoned”. His works should therefore rather be collectively titled *Remembrance of Things by No Means Past* (Eder 2001: 2), since they concern a past which penetrates the present, crippling and torturing his characters and stopping them from living normal lives.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is the passage in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* when a bite of a freshly baked madeleine evokes involuntary childhood memories.



Figure 2. The porcelaine horse in the Terezin shop window reflecting the photographer, which emphasizes the strategy's self-referentiality (Sebald 2001a: 197).

The function of these photographs is, I would suggest, diagrammatic since they have a structuring effect in the narrative. They also call for reading as 'imaginization' — involving not only visual, but also aural, olfactory and tactile effects — and 'allegorization'. Because not only do these black and white photographs dialogue with the text, or rather, *disrupt* the dialogue with the text, creating their own eerie voices counterpointing and sometimes contradicting that of the narrator. Instead of creating a logical order, they appear, scattered across the

pages, to produce a narrative of their own. Secondly, their generally somber and melancholic mood suggests sorrow and loss, not least the decayed buildings and terrible calmness in Terezin today, often more suggestive than the verbal narration. Thirdly, the sheer amount of photographs puts the emphasis not only on the visual but also evokes the other senses synaesthetically: from the busy railway station in Antwerp, the terrible noise in Terezin during its time as a concentration camp, the echo and smell in the staircase in Prague whose intricate marble pattern lurks in the background of Austerlitz's memory, overcoming him with dizziness as he is trying to remember his past.

These images function, of course, highly metaphorically since the characteristic of metaphors is, as Colapietro (forthcoming) points out, "heuristic intimation" in the sense that "they open a new field of inquiry". That is, I would suggest, precisely how these photographs are instrumentalized in the narrative. By severing the direct link between the sign and its referent, Sebald has his compelling story metaphorically enact Freud's theory of trauma as the inability of the psyche to deal with traumatic events (see Freud 1964; Laplanche, Pontalis 1967: 465–469). Instead of supporting or reinforcing memory, photographs act as a shield from the traumatic experiences stored inaccessible to it, such as Austerlitz's traumatic separation from his parents and his being sent by the *Kindertransport*<sup>9</sup> from Prague to a cold and unemotional childless British couple. As has been recently shown in parallels between photography's representational techniques and the enigmatic phenomenon of trauma, the fleeting moments captured mechanically in photographs mirror those captured experientially in a traumatized psyche (Baer 2002: 4–8). A photograph therefore becomes the medium that transports its spectator-reader to a past that has either been officially "forgotten" or, as a traumatic

---

<sup>9</sup> The *Kindertransport* was the organized transport between the pogroms of the Kristallnacht 1938 and the start of WWII in 1939 for 10,000 children who were sent without their parents from Nazi Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland to safety in Great Britain.

experience, has been suppressed. In so doing, it no longer simply represents a past event but instead provides access to another kind of experience that can be both explosive and painful.

Sebald's use of photographs to enact Austerlitz's search for the "lost time" of his childhood shows a similar pattern since the images that the protagonist is able to recuperate, replace and substitute memories and experiences that were either suppressed as the result of trauma or were never effectively remembered. As an architectural historian and photographer, possessed with the perception and representation of space both of which are inextricably linked to both vision and memory, Austerlitz is eventually able to reconstruct events affected by his memory loss, which echoes Freud's theory about the delayed development of impressions hidden in the unconscious. What is never clear, however, is to what extent the photographs that Sebald has Austerlitz record stimulate a *true* process of remembrance or whether they just function as substitutes permitting a general reconstitution of lost time from the outside (Duttlinger 2004: 160). Sebald's use of photographs in this novel in which they emerge as being inevitably staged and manipulated would therefore seem to self-reflexively reduplicate and reflect his own manipulation of photographs. The complex relationship between Sebald and his own creation is even self-reflexively suggested at the end of *Austerlitz*, when the unhappy protagonist hands the narrator the key to his house to stay there and study the photographs which, as he says, will be all that would remain of his life — diagrammatically and metaphorically reflecting the narrative as an archive of photographs which first generated the story and the key as the novel which is its result.

By confronting readers with hybrid forms and forcing them to switch between the two media, attention is drawn to the differences between the verbal and the visual, between the linear structure of the verbal chain and the two-dimensional photograph with its seemingly much more powerful representational potential. Following Fischer-

Lichte's<sup>10</sup> distinction between degrees of performativity, in being inter-medial and hybrid, these narratives are even more radically performative, since the switching between different media automatically forces the reader / spectator to compare the difference, which self-referentially draws attention not only to the media involved *qua* media but also focuses on their very materiality. This is, I argue, what accounts for the particularly performative power generated by the use of photographs in narrative — in particular those concerning trauma and ritual, which necessarily involve performativity — which efficiently exploits photography's alternations between indexical sign and iconic potential, wavering between its function as evidence and its capacity for creating an effect of resemblance.

#### 4. Maps and territories

Similar to the use of photographs, the insertion of maps into literary text is performative, too, as it introduces new projections of space. Maps are hybrid semiotic systems, since they include both graphic and textual elements. They give geographical information but also cultural information (Nöth 2010). They are spatial embodiments of knowledge with the peculiar potential that they stimulate new cognitive engagements. This lies in their capacity to abstract and to generalize, which makes them ideal not only for activities such as solving problems, hypothesizing or just tracing imaginary journeys on a map — or in the mind. Given that these activities all have to do with mental projection and imagination, with disruption and efficacies, they are also intimately connected with the way we produce and process texts. Their use in fictional texts would also seem to be possible for both

---

<sup>10</sup> These were the distinctions drawn by Erika Fischer-Lichte at her keynote lecture, *Culture as performance*, at the *Symposium of Performativity: A Paradigm for the Studies of Art and Culture*, Copenhagen 30 Nov–3 Dec 2004.

‘imaginizing’ and ‘allegorizing’, because do maps also not evoke images and can they not function as metaphors in texts? Is not the ‘imaginization’ that a map inspires precisely its strength? Although the performativity of maps has to do with the diagrammatic relationship between the map and what it refers to, that is, how it relates to known, unknown or merely imaginary worlds — in other words, with maps being diagrams, even a geographical map is to some extent metaphoric.

This becomes evident in even such an early colonial text as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1975[1719]) in which textual and cartographical mapping serve both to produce new space and, in so doing, unmask this very undertaking as a performative strategy (Ljungberg 2007). I would argue that it is Crusoe’s careful verbal mapping of ‘his’ island and its flora and fauna as well as his trials and tribulations which, by evoking images of visual, tactile and olfactory quality, at times sounding like that of a biologist’s journal, fascinates the novel’s readers and accounts for its longevity as *the* core text in Western literature. Moreover, the fact that the map included in its fourth edition introduces elements not so readily perceived in the novel demonstrate the efficiency not only with which a map can orient its readers both in spatial and temporal ways. The delineation of his travels on the world map accompanying the novel is also a cultural map, showing how Crusoe, as the prototypical *homo economicus* (Watt 1996: 154), puts his mark on the world by marking his presence on the map, leaving traces of his travels and appropriating it, first by naming the island (‘R. Crusoe I.’) and then taking control of it. But *Robinson Crusoe* can also be read metaphorically, as an allegory of how Defoe, the critical journalist and satirical observer of England’s political and economic events of his times, transformed the uncharted ‘natural’ island into an ideal image of England as a ‘garden utopia’, his “Dominion”, in which his “People are perfectly subjected” and he himself is the “Lord and Lawgiver” (Defoe 1975: 174). This corroborates Johansen’s claim that “[a]llegorization — metaphoric iconi-

zation — is, by the very nature of its process, bound to reveal mismatches, differences, incompatibilities” (Johansen 2002: 339).

This might explain the obvious fascination with maps that writers have displayed since very early times and still do. A cursory look around any library or bookstore reveals an astonishing profusion of maps in contemporary literature: Jorge Luis Borges, Margaret Atwood, Paul Auster, Peter Carey, Aritha van Herk, Michael Ondaatje, or Minette Walters, to mention just a few, have all incorporated maps into their works at some point. Spatialization allows for the visualization of the text as a dynamic process. Postmodern and in particular postcolonial fictions problematize their textual geographies in which aesthetic, emotional, social and ethical concerns intersect in complex ways. By introducing various visual media, they show the extent to which the real has become medial and the boundaries between the fictive and factual porous and permeable. Maps as diagrams allow experimentation by creating a fictional world that resembles our life-world in which we can lose ourselves to our imaginary travels but also try out and test ideas and actions that we otherwise would not dare perform, among those criticizing authorities, or helping us understand complex relationships. Moreover, maps make meaning by relating one place, that is, point on the map, to another, which is what permits us to locate ourselves as subjects in the world. This is probably one of the reasons why they have always played such an important part in signification and communication: whether we want to explore our physical, symbolic or immaterial worlds, we need to know where we are.

However, there is a very recent addition to ‘map fiction’ in which the expansive and locating potential of mapping is inverted. Reif Larsson’s *Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* (2009) presents T. S. Spivet, a compulsive cartographer and diagrammer who desperately tries to give meaning to his random life on a ranch in Montana. Every drawing, he confesses, is an attempt to confirm “a feeling I had had my entire mapping life, since I first charted how one could walk up the

side of Mt. Humbug and shake hands with God” (Larsson 2009: 10). When the story starts, T. S. has just received a phone call from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington that he has been given a very prestigious award for his scientific drawings of the *Carabida brachinus* beetle expelling boiling secretions. Unaware of T. S. [Tecumseh Sparrow)’s young age — he is only 12 years old — the Museum has invited him to Washington to give a speech and begin a fellowship, which makes him reflect: “All at once the preposterousness of what was happening fell into place in my mind, I did not often remember that I was 12 years old. Life was too busy to dwell on things like age, but faced with a great misunderstanding fabricated by grown-ups, I suddenly felt the full weight of my youth, painfully and acutely” (Larsson 2009: 11). In the following chapters we then follow T. S. on his cross-country tour to Washington D.C., without money, without transport and without the knowledge of his parents, joining a long row of young, alienated literary travelers from Huckleberry Finn to T. C. Boyle.

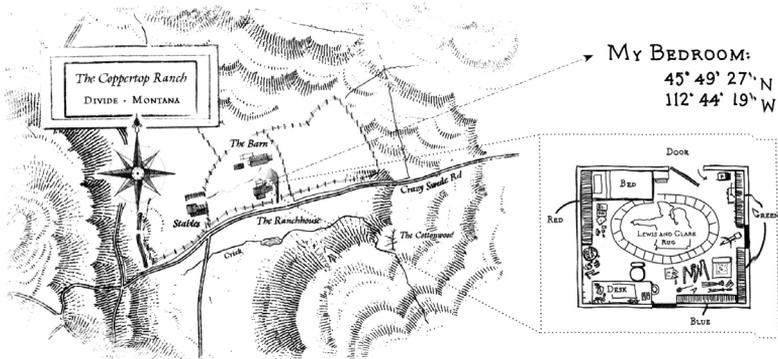


Figure 3. The Coppertone Ranch (Larsson 2009: 3).

But woven through the wildly digressive narrative is the story of his problematic childhood, the death of his adored brother in a shooting accident, which has alienated his parents and silenced both communication and conversation in the family. It is as if, despite their wonderful execution, these maps rather reflect a desperate attempt to control the uncertainties of daily life by constructing a systematic strategy to withhold life against tragedy. Maps and diagrams of sewer systems, Washington D.C., North Dakota ecoregions and locations of the 26 MacDonald locations in the area, speculative projections of the American coastline resulting from various global warming forecasts, the place of origin of the world's largest religions, urban loneliness — mapping in T. S.'s life becomes a mania, a compulsion to keep the world under control. Imaginization becomes dominated by allegorization, the metaphoric reading of growing up and coping but doing this by taking refuge to abstract means of representation, living by diagrammatization. Which, as a consequence, takes control of the reader by constantly drawing him or her to the margin: instead of adding new dimensions to the reading, it shreds it by constantly forcing the reader to digress to these 'notes in the margin' and constantly get lost!

Similarity plays a fundamental role for such cognitive activities as reading and interpreting a literary text and is therefore a precondition for literature. Reading experientially is thus the performance of actively dialoguing with the text and in so doing, performatively generating a fictional world. Not only verbal but also visual texts come alive by various forms of iconization to establish forms of resemblance. In particular, the insertion of different semiotic systems like photography and cartography contributes to establishing likenesses by diagrammatically projecting such relationships. This turns literary interpretation into a performative practice of mapping as it figures, conceptualizes and transforms texts into mental models that facilitate

meaningful interaction between reader and text and, in turn, reader and world.<sup>11</sup>

## References

- Austin, John L. 2003[1962]. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Baer, Ulrich 2002. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bal, Mieke 1997. *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Barthes, Roland 2000[1980]. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. [Howard, Richard (trans.)] New York: Hill and Wang.
- Brassaï 1997. *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Butler, Judith 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Colapietro, Vincent 2010. Literary practices and imaginative possibilities: Towards a pragmatic understanding of iconicity. In: Conradie, J.; Johl, R.; Beukes, M.; Fischer, O.; Ljungberg, C. (eds.), *Signergy (= Iconicity in Language and Literature 9)*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 23–45.
- (forthcoming). Image, diagram, and metaphor: Unmined resource and unresolved questions. In: Fischer, O.; Ljungberg C.; Michelucci, P. (eds.), *Iconicity in Language and Literature 10*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- CP = Peirce, Charles S. 1931–1958. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [Hartshorne, Charles; Weiss, Paul (eds.), 1931–1935; vols. 7–8. Burks, A. W. (ed.) 1958; In-text references are to CP, followed by volume and paragraph numbers]
- Defoe, Daniel 1975[1719]. *Robinson Crusoe*. New York: Norton.
- Derrida, Jacques 1988. Signature, event, context. In: *Limited Inc*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1–23.
- Dubois, Philippe 1990. *Der fotografische Akt. Versuch über ein theoretisches Dispositiv*. Amsterdam: Verlag der Kunst.

---

<sup>11</sup> I would like to thank Vincent Colapietro and Winfried Nöth for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

- Duttlinger, Carolin 2004. Traumatic photographs: Remembrance and the technical media. In: Long, J. J.; Whitehead, A. (eds.), *W. G. Sebald's Austerlitz. W. G. Sebald — A Critical Companion*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 155–171.
- Eder, Richard 2001. Austerlitz: Excavating a Life. *New York Times*. Oct. 28, E: 2.
- EP = Peirce, Charles Sanders 1998. *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings*, 2 vols, 1893–1913 [Houser, N. et al. (eds.)]. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. [In-text references are to EP, followed by volume and page numbers].
- Freeman, Margaret H. 2004. Poetry as power: The dynamics of cognitive poetics as a scientific and literary paradigm. In: Veivo, H.; Petterson, B.; Polvinen, M. (eds.), *Cognition and Literary Interpretation in Practice*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 31–58.
- Freud, Sigmund 1964. Moses and Monotheism. In: Strachey, J. (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Gass, William H. 1985. *Habitations of the Word: Essays*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Haley, Michael Cabot 1988. *The Semeiosis of Poetic Metaphor*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Johansen, Jørgen Dines 2002. *Literary Discourse. A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Larsson, Reif 2009. *The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet*. New York: Penguin.
- Laplanche, Jean; Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand 1967. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. New York, London: W. W. Norton.
- Lee, Hermione 1992. Foreword, notes in: Woolf, Virginia 1992: ix–xliii; 227–259.
- Ljungberg, Christina 1999. *To Join, to Fit and to Make: The Creative Craft of Margaret Atwood's Fiction*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- 2004. Models of reading: Diagrammatic aspects of literary texts. In: Veivo, H.; Petterson, B.; Polvinen, M. (eds.), *Cognition and Literary Interpretation in Practice*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 105–125.
- 2007. Das Kartieren von neuem Raum: Die Beziehung zwischen Karte und Text in Daniel Defoes Robinson Crusoe. In: Glauser, J.; Kiening, C. (eds.), *Text-Bild-Karte: Kartographien der Vormoderne*. Freiburg: Rombach, 477–499.

- 2009. Subjectivity as performance in literary texts. In: Veivo, H.; Ljungberg, C.; Johansen, J. D. (eds.), *Redefining Literary Semiotics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 86–109.
- Nöth, Winfried 2001. Semiotic foundations of iconicity in language and literature. In: Fischer, O.; Nänny, M. (eds.), *The Motivated Sign (= Iconicity in Language and Literature 2)*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 17–28.
- 2003. Photography between reference and self-reference. In: Horak R. E. (ed.), *Rethinking Photography I+II. Narration and New Reduction in Photography*. Salzburg: Fotohof, 22–39.
- 2008. Semiotic foundations of natural linguistics and diagrammatical iconicity. In: Willems, K; de Cuypere, L. (eds.), *Naturalness and Iconicity in Language (= Iconicity in Language and Literature 7)*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 73–100.
- 2009. Metareference from a semiotic perspective. In: Wolf, W.; Bantleon, K.; Thoss, J. (eds.), *Metareference across Media. Theory and Case Studies*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 89–120.
- 2010. The rule of the territory over its representation. In: *Herrschaft verorten: Politische Kartographien des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Zurich, Jan 29–31, 14.
- Sacks, Oliver 2010. A neurologist's notebook: A man of letters. *New Yorker*, June 28: 22–28.
- Santaella, Lucia 1998. Die Fotografie zwischen Tod und Ewigkeit. *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 20: 243–268.
- 2001. *Matrizes da linguagem e pensamento*. Sao Paulo: Iluminuras.
- Sebald, Winfried Georg 1996. *The Emigrants*. London: New Direction Books.
- 2001a. *Austerlitz*. New York: Random House.
- 2001b. Preoccupied with death, but still funny. Interview with Lubow, A. *New York Times*, 11. Dec., late ed., E: 1.
- Short, Thomas Lloyd 2007. *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sonesson, Göran 1999. From mechanical reproduction to digital production. *VISIO* 4(1): 11–36.
- Sontag, Susan 1977. *On Photography*. New York: Penguin.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 1988. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Stalla, Heidi 2008. William Bankes: Echoes of Egypt in Virginia Woolf's 'To the Lighthouse'. *Woolf Studies Annual* 14: 21–34.
- Stieglitz, Robert R. 1994. The Minoan origin of Tyrian purple. *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 57(1): 46–54.

- Stockwell, Peter 2002. *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Watt, Ian 1996. *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Winston, Janet 2009. *Woolf's To the Lighthouse. A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum.
- Woolf, Virginia 1992. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Penguin.

### **Динамические проявления интеракции: перформативная функция иконичности в литературных текстах**

По Пирсу сходство или подобие являются основой отношения между иконическими знаками и их динамическими объектами. А что является основой самого сходства и как возникает феномен иконичности? Как он работает в культурных практиках и процессах, с помощью которых создаются знаки разного типа (напр., картографические методы, используемые при рисовании карт или — в более общем плане — диаграмматические методы, с помощью которых иконически репрезентируются сети отношений). В какой мере они сами являются *перформансами* (карты всегда — одновременно и результаты картографической работы, и повод для создания новых)? Приводя примеры из текстов Вирджинии Вульф, В. Г. Себальда и Рейфа Ларсена, я утверждаю, что литературные произведения предоставляют нам уникальный материал для изучения перформативного измерения иконичности как предпосылку семиозиса в комплексных интеракциях между иконом, индексом и метафорой.

### **Interaktsiooni dünaamilised avaldumised: ikoonilisuse performatiivne funktsioon kirjandustekstides**

C. S. Peirce'i järgi on sarnasus või samalaadsus ikooniliste märkide ja nende dünaamiliste objektide vahelise suhte aluseks. Aga mis on sarnasuse või samalaadsuse enda aluseks ning kuidas ikoonilisuse fenomen tekib? Kuidas toimib see kultuurilistes praktikates ja protsessides, mille

abil luuakse eri tüüpe märke (nt. kartograafilised meetodid, mida kasutakse kaartide joonistamiseks, või üldisemalt, diagrammilised meetodid, millega representeeritakse ikooniliselt suhete võrgustikke)? Mil määral on nad ise *esitused* (kaardid on alati nii kaardistamise tulemused kui ka ajendid uute kaartide loomiseks)? Tuues näiteid Virginia Woolfi, W. G. Sebaldi ja Reif Larsseni tekstidest, väidan ma, et kirjandustekstid pakuvad meile unikaalset materjali uurimaks ikoonilisuse performatiivset mõõdet ikooni, indeksi ja metafoori keerukates interaktsioonides kui semioosi ja märgiloome eeldust.