



Navigating Venice's Literary Nightscapes through Post-Representational Mapmaking

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Received: October 2022 – Accepted: November 2022

Abstract

This paper investigates post-representational mapmaking as a co-constitutive element of a research-through-practice experience, namely a phenomenographic drawing session conducted in Venice, Italy. Contributing to a broader geo-literary investigation, the research experience aims to evaluate a creative method developed to collect data about the roles and functions of literary texts in nightscapes' co-production processes. Nightwalking, drawing phenomenographic sketches and the recollection of (literary) memories are the primary components of a set of repeated actions constituting the method of the research-through-practice experience. Finally, sketches work with an autoethnographic text built around fieldnotes to report as much information as possible. While re-elaborating this research experience, post-representational mapmaking emerged as a relevant tool with which to reorganise and interpret data. During this process, a map—or rather, an open-ended layer of a complex map of Venice's literary nightscapes—has emerged, allowing for meaningful reflection. On the one hand, the map provides a synoptic outline of the research experience, connecting nightscape sketches and literary memories on a single sheet of paper. On the other, it points out the relevance of hitherto unmapped elements, such as materiality, itinerary and other literary texts, to further develop the analysis of nightscapes' co-production processes.

Keywords: Post-Representational Mapmaking, Venice, Phenomenographic Drawing, Autoethnography, Literary Nightscape

1. Introduction

This paper investigates post-representational mapmaking as a co-constitutive element of a research-through-practice experience devoted to the collection of data for a broader geo-literary investigation of the urban Venetian night. While evaluating the meanings and potentialities of this research experience, post-representational

mapmaking emerged as a relevant tool with which to reorganise and interpret data. Accordingly, this methodological reflection develops because “geographers must first ask how they conceptualize and frame their questions and data” (Del Casino and Hanna, 2006, p. 36).

To achieve this goal, the following section outlines the research-through-practice experience

to provide the necessary background information. Afterwards, two complementary sections focus on post-representational mapmaking in theory and practice. These sections provide a definition within which to frame the concept in the context of this analysis, as well as a description of the mapmaking. During this process, a map has emerged that can deliver meaningful insights. On one hand, it provides a synoptic outline of the research experience, connecting nightscape sketches and literary memories on a single sheet of paper. On the other, it points out the relevance of previously unmapped elements, such as materiality, itinerary and other literary texts, to further develop the analysis of nightscapes' co-production processes.

To conclude, I take into account how the map can be considered as an open-ended layer of a more complex map of Venice's literary nightscapes, i.e., the ever-evolving blueprint narrating the development of broader geo-literary investigation.

2. Drawing Nightscapes as a Research-through-Practice Experience

The above-mentioned research-through-practice experience is part of a broader geo-literary investigation of Venice's urban night that aims to scrutinise the roles and functions of literary texts (Papotti and Tanca, 2019) in the co-production processes animating local nightscapes.

Initially employed to analyse the night-time economy, the nightscape is now a recurring and flexible concept and lens in the field of night studies. The use of the term "nightscape" has proliferated due to Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands's analysis (2003). Focussing on young adults and urban nightlife, the authors develop a two-fold definition of nightscapes.

First, we present an understanding of nightscapes through an *integrated "circuit of culture" which comprises the three processes of production, regulation and consumption* (Du Gay, 1997). By this we mean that, to fully understand an area of activity such as nightlife, it is imperative to simultaneously explore who and what is involved in producing nightlife spaces (i.e. designing, marketing, selling, property markets,

corporate strategies, etc.), who and what is involved in regulating them (i.e. laws and legislations, surveillance, entrance requirements, codes of conduct), and who and what is involved in consuming them (i.e. lived experience, perceptions, stereotypes, etc.) ...

Second, *urban nightscapes can be understood as a mixture of mainstream, residual and alternative nightlife spaces* (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003, emphasis in original, pp. 4-5).

As research on the night-time economy develops (Hadfield, 2015), a growing cohort of scholars is realising that the analysis of the night-time economy cannot subsume the analysis of the urban night (Edensor, 2012; Eldridge and Roberts, 2013; Shaw, 2014). Accordingly, they expand the realm of night studies to include a wider array of interdependent subjects, including but not limited to ecology and light pollution, public health, public safety, urban planning, night-time governance, nightwork, and tourism (van Liempt et al., 2015; Shaw, 2018). Relevantly, opening new lines of research does not nullify the interpretive potential of nightscape as a concept, because Chatterton and Hollands adopt "an approach which is sensitive to processes as well as possibilities" (2003, p. 4). Consequently, all that is required is to reframe the concept so as to encompass a broader set of issues underpinned by the understanding of the urban night as a global and, at the same time, situated event. For this purpose, I draw on Mike Crang's *Rhythms of the city* (2001) to reframe nightscapes as temporalised spaces, "fields of emergent potentialities, with connections and happenings that may or may not come to fruition but are spheres offering the possibility of multiplicity" (Crang, 2001, p. 205). Inspired by this understanding, nightscapes become specific night space-times co-produced by ongoing, fleeting and reciprocal relationships between people, objects, places and discourses. Consistently, the analysis adopts a post-representational approach, and the maintenance of balance between things, representations and practices (Tanca, 2018) is of paramount importance in describing Venice's nightscapes and developing the analysis.

Regarding a viable method with which to collect data, the scientific literature on creative methodologies (Cameron, 2012; Hawkins, 2015)

suggests phenomenographic sketching (Le Calvé and Gaudin, 2019) and observational drawing (Brice, 2018) as practical solutions. As a result, I set off for my first phenomenographic drawing session in Venice, Italy.

The research experience consists of an individual, unplanned navigation of the local urban night and is aimed at evaluating a creative method based on a set of repeated actions: nightwalking, drawing phenomenographic sketches and the recollection of (literary) memories.

Nightwalking is the first action taken, and it organically connects the distinct phases of the research experience, being both a way of reflecting and a practice involved in the co-production processes of nightscapes (Dunn, 2016). The second action, drawing a phenomenographic sketch *in situ* (Wylie and Webster, 2019), causes a variation in the rhythm of the research experience. The decision to begin drawing a sketch arises from a subjective perception of having a fair chance of grasping a relevant feature with which to define Venice's nocturnal sense of place (Foote and Azaryahu, 2009). Indeed, phenomenographic sketches do not attempt to report landscape features as faithfully as possible. Conversely, they graphically document the ongoing process of attuning to nightscapes (Edensor, 2012; Bille and Simonsen, 2021). During this progressive attunement process, the materiality of the urban night, sensory perceptions and suggestions foster the involuntary recollection of memories. Among others, literary memories emerge and fleetingly influence both the perception and understanding of the nightscape. To make this process explicit, I jot down the recalled literary quote on the corresponding sketch (Figure 1).

Finally, sketches work with an autoethnographic text (Vannini, 2015) built around fieldnotes and personal impressions to report as much information as possible. Attempting to fully develop this research experience, I reorganise and interpret data, employing post-representational mapmaking.

3. Post-representational Mapmaking in Theory

Taking into account the potential ambiguities shaping the meaning of expressions such as post-/more-than-/non-representational (Rossetto, 2015), a concise selection of scientific literature frames the meaning of post-representational mapmaking for the purposes of this analysis. As Rossetto (2015) points out, 'what is now widely identified with "post-representational cartography" is this ontogenetic approach'. The ontogenetic approach to maps and mappings corresponds to the recognition of their processual nature and is spreading due to the seminal article that Kitchin and Dodge (2007) devoted to the rethinking of maps. The authors built their reasoning around the definition of maps as "emergent".

Maps are of-the-moment, brought into being through practices (embodied, social, technical), *always* remade every time they are engaged with; mapping is a process of constant reterritorialization. As such, maps are transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context-dependent. *Maps are practices* – they are always *mappings*; spatial practices enacted to solve relational problems (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007, p. 335).

As a result, focusing on the production and consumption of maps and mappings allows us to transcend the binary oppositions of "representational" and "non-representational". Maps and mappings become "both representations and practices" (Del Casino and Hanna, 2006, p. 36) that come to life when people use them in a specific setting and for a particular purpose, combining their representational dimension with "their practical and spatial performance" (Rossetto, 2012, p. 33).

Following this introductory reflection, mapmaking may become relevant for this research experience for several reasons. First, the recognition of transitoriness and context-dependence as defining features establishes a correspondence between mappings and a research-through-practice experience designed to delve into the fleeting reciprocal relationships that continuously co-produce nightscapes. Second, considering maps as emergent means that mappings can meet the needs of this

intermediate stage of research because they leave room for subsequent corrections and additions. Third, taking into account the “genealogy” of mapping practices and products related to the same research experience offers the chance to deliver a meta-narrative – i.e., a “narrative of mappings” (Caquard and Cartwright, 2014) – documenting the development of the research itself. Finally, mapmaking may help to develop the broader research project. As a spatial practice enacted to solve relational problems, it opens new lines of research concerning the roles and functions of elements participating in nightscapes’ co-production processes.

4. Post-Representational Mapmaking in Practice

The present section reconstructs and focuses on the mapmaking process to highlight specific features of the map. In addition, it paves the way for concluding remarks related to further applications for maps and mappings in the context of the broader geo-literary investigation.

Maps do not then emerge in the same way for all individuals. Rather they emerge in contexts and through a mix of creative, reflexive, playful, tactile and habitual practices; affected by the knowledge, experience and skill of the individual to perform mappings and apply them in the world (Kitchin, 2010, p. 9).

After the phenomenographic drawing session, I contemplate mapmaking as a powerful tool and practice with which to foster meaningful reflection. The map summarises the research experience, providing a synoptic outline of the main elements of the analysis, i.e., phenomenographic sketches and literary memories. The map base consists of a watercolour rendering of Venice’s historic city centre and includes simplified adaptations of the original phenomenographic sketches in the corresponding locations. To shed light on the relevance of literary memories, quotes saturate the leftover space as overlays in white ink (Figure 2).

While realising this map, three intertwined issues develop. First, drawing phenomenographic sketches *in situ* proves a worthwhile practice with which to collect data

and thus develop a geo-literary investigation. Although it is part of a set of interconnected actions, drawing stands out as the first step in the attunement process, leading to the recollection of literary quotes. Drawing *in situ* forces us to pay attention to details and spatial relations and, at the same time, allows sensory perceptions and the materiality of nightscapes to reveal their affecting potentials. Memories come back to us spontaneously. They temporarily modify our perception and understanding of the nightscape, making both drawer and memories participate in the co-production process. Second, the map does not introduce and problematize relevant elements, such as the itinerary and materiality of nightscapes. However, the autoethnographic text operates as a reliable source of information about unmapped elements. Significantly, the text brings into play both the itinerary and the materiality of the urban night and emphasises the interplay between them. On one hand, the text introduces the itinerary as the spatial reconstruction of the nightwalking practice, i.e., a nocturnal stroll spent indulging in urban or literary wanderings, with no predetermined path to follow. On the other, it provides a list of basic elements participating in the co-production processes of nightscapes, namely trachyte, Istrian stone, wood, water, salt-damaged bricks and light and dark. Third, there is one more unmapped and seemingly unmappable element, i.e., the plurality of literary texts available for memories and quotes.

5. Conclusion

When these intertwined issues are combined with post-representational mapping theory, relevant insights emerge and demonstrate post-representational mapmaking as a co-constitutive component of the research-through-practice experience and, by extension, broader geo-literary investigation. First, the phenomenographic drawing session is a research-through-practice experience designed to delve into the fleeting reciprocal relationships co-producing nightscapes. Meaningfully, maps and mappings meet the needs of this method by being transitory, fleeting, contingent, relational and context-dependent (Kitchin and Dodge,

2007). Second, this map does not introduce and problematize relevant elements, such as the itinerary, the materiality of nightscapes, and the plurality of literary texts available for memories and quotes. Indeed, this is due to the fact that the map is an intermediate stage, just as the research-through-practice experience is an intermediate stage of broader geo-literary investigation. Third, identifying the mapping and the research-through-practice experience as intermediate stages means that they are parts of a developing process in which there is always room for subsequent corrections and additions.

As a result, further phenomenographic drawing sessions and new maps are supposed to emerge, providing a narrative (Caquard and Cartwright, 2014) documenting the development of broader geo-literary investigation. Accordingly, the map emerging from this research-through-practice experience can be understood as an open-ended layer of a more complex map of Venice's literary nightscapes, i.e., the ever-evolving blueprint narrating the development of broader geo-literary investigation.

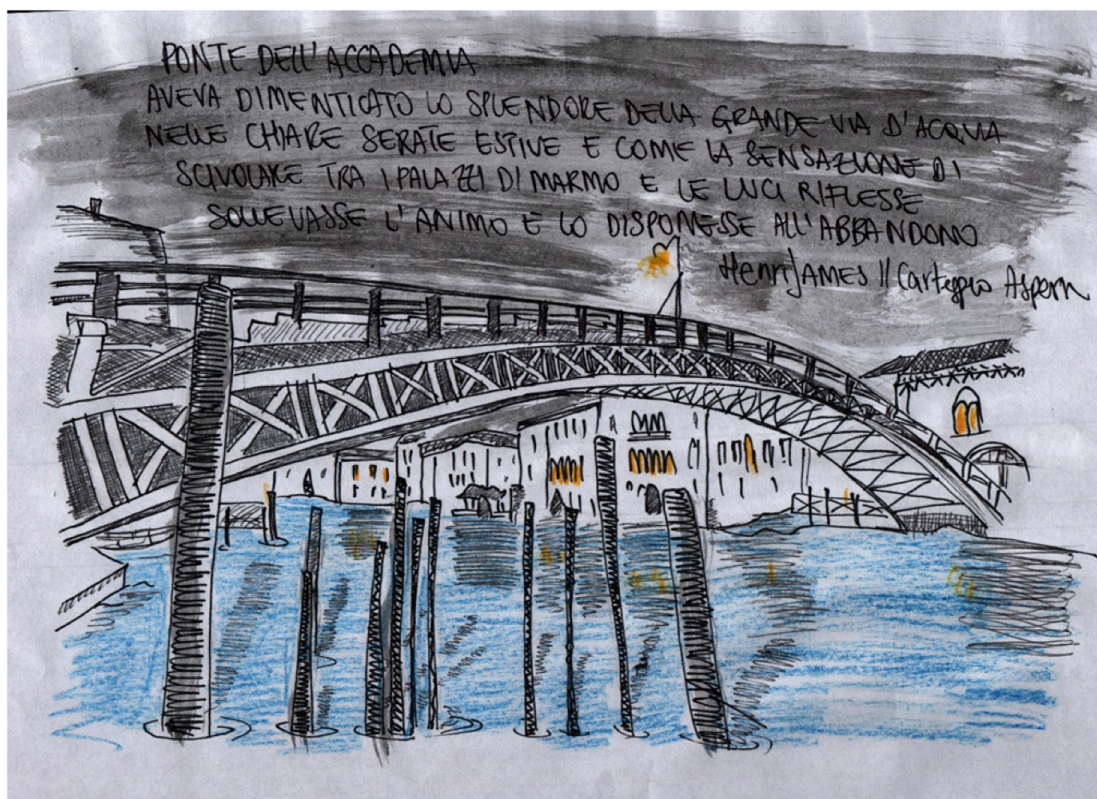


Figure 1. Phenomenographic sketch (Source: author). Accademia Bridge “She had forgotten how splendid the great waterway looked on a clear, hot summer evening, and how the sense of floating between marble palaces and reflected lights disposed the mind to sympathetic talk”. Henry James, *The Aspern Papers*.

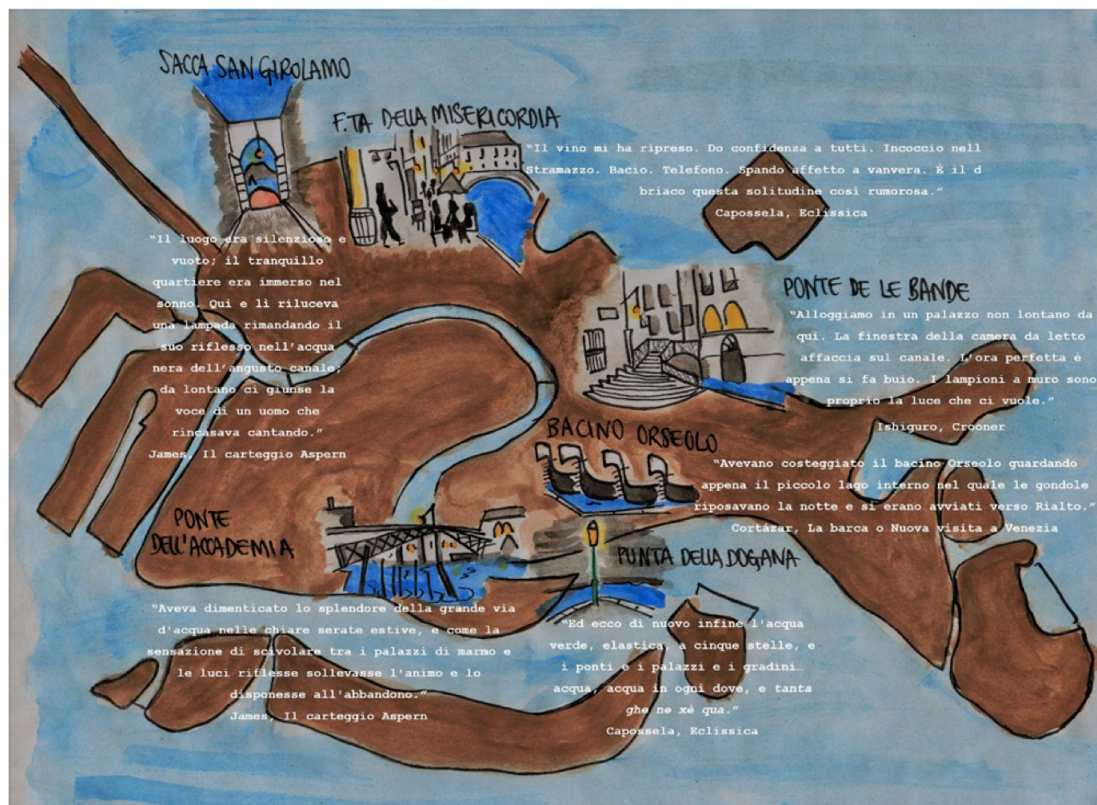


Figure 2. Post-representational map outlining the research-through-practice experience (Source: author).

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