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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perceptions, cartographies, and 'cartographies of time' in the political novel

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Abstract

The paper examines the relation of the form of political novel to perceptions. Three possibilities are analysed. First, when the political novel shares perceptions of the hegemonic power. Second, when the novel trains how to suspiciously and critically reveal hegemonic manipulations of perceptions. Third, where the form of the novel enhances and emancipates perceptive faculties of readers and allows them to project new democratic activities. This three-fold relation is also referred to cartographic activities (including cartographies of time) as depicted in political novels.

Plain language summary

The article describes how those in power influence citizens' perceptions of space and time, and shows how political novels can support the 'eye in the sky' perspective of the regime, or criticise and undermine it. The most interesting occurs to be the third option, when political novels invent space and time for the new and free democratic activities.

Keywords

perception, cartography, political novel, Milan Kundera, Annie Ernaux

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Milan Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1981) was written in 1978, shortly after Kundera had decided to emigrate from communist Czechoslovakia because he was persecuted by the regime as a dissident for his engagement in the democratic processes of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968.[1] The novel describes the various consequences of the disappointing political enterprise of an entire generation of left-wing intellectuals. Their starting point was the installment of the communist regime, which they had warmly supported in their youth:

> In February 1948, Communist leader Klement Gottwald stepped out on the balcony of a Baroque palace in Prague to address the hundreds of thousands of his fellow citizens packed into Old Town Square. It was a crucial moment in Czech history – a fateful moment of the kind that occurs once or twice in a millennium.
>
> Gottwald was flanked by his comrades, with Clementis standing next to him. There were snow flurries, it was cold, and Gottwald was bareheaded. The solicitous Clementis took off his own fur cap and set it on Gottwald's head.
>
> The Party propaganda section put out hundreds of thousands of copies of a photograph of that balcony with Gottwald, a fur cap on his head and comrades at his side, speaking to the nation. On that balcony the history of Communist Czechoslovakia was born. Every child knew the photograph from posters, schoolbooks, and museums.
>
> Four years later Clementis was charged with treason and hanged. The propaganda section immediately airbrushed him out of history and, obviously, out of all the photographs as well. Ever since, Gottwald has stood on that balcony alone. Where Clementis once stood, there is only bare palace wall. All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald's head (1 on page 10).

The inaugurating passage from Kundera's novel includes a reference to the imprinted perception of a powerful political event. The image of the place and the moment when the Czech and Slovak communists seized power is reproduced, i.e. petrified as a founding perception, an iconic image of the new order. The reader of the novel is aware of the fact that this perception – among many others – was intended by the powers to control the perceptual activities of the citizens and to steer their emotions. This is what every power does, and we can use the political novels of socialist realism as an example of how they are in sync with the processes of stabilising and reproducing this mode of perception of the dominant political order.

The passage quickly complicates this pathetic style of reproducing the founding perception, as the narrator tells us a dramatic story of manipulations concerning the famous primordial scene. The novel seems to belong to the critical narratives that expose these cynical operations on the perceptual field of politics. The erasure of the cursed politician from iconic images has analogous practises in the political novels of socialist realism, where the new editions of books written by the servants of the regime were given a discreet makeover or editing in order to adapt the book to the latest demands of the party. This is why every important political novel of socialist realism was by definition a new and different edition, although these acts of their political design were as secret as the removal of Clementis from his picture with Gottwald. Exposing this kind of manipulation is the domain of the critical perception of political novels, which devote most of the reader's attention to directing his or her suspicions towards the official field of perception of the political order. The tragic and somewhat comical and stubborn persistence of Clementis – his fur hat on Gottwald's head – was a training in mistrust and critical analysis of every official use of perceptions in the public sphere by the hegemonic powers of the time. The development of mistrust as the basic activity of some political novels is necessary to break ties with the most aggressive perceptive imprints imposed on citizens by rulers.

Right after the initial part of the book, the narrator follows the Czech resistance hero of the Prague Spring, who is spied on by the secret service but nevertheless decides to take a risky journey to his former lover. Kundera does not fully advocate this independent activist, as the man wants to destroy some letters in which he tells the unattractive girl from his past of his true love. Just like the communist regime, he is deeply driven by the urge to manipulate the perception of the past. The novel definitely does not limit its perceptual adventure to the model of the suspicious vivisection of official political perception. Chapter by chapter, it builds up a composition that has been called "a novel in the form of variations" (1 139), in which the same scenes and problems reappear in unexpected places and sometimes in a new guise. The iconic scene on the balcony is described a few more times, as are the themes of memory, manipulation, disappointment and other issues raised in the opening paragraph. The form of the novel aims to achieve maximum concentration on the chosen themes. This is why the author has accepted to call his book "phenomenological" (8 on page 35), with some reservations about the important difference between the philosophical and the artistic treatment of phenomenological enterprises. The novel aims to become a unique tool for long-term study, in which the composition and repetition of perceptions should lead to an awareness of them, increase the intensity of the phenomena studied and maximise concentration on them. The novel strengthens the reader's perceptive capacity and prepares him or her for independent activity, including in the political sphere.

This allows us to recognise the threefold or three-dimensional relationship of political novels to the perceptions shared in public and private life. Political novels can be involved in the reproduction of the perceptions disseminated by the hegemonic powers or by the 'eye in the sky' that controls the entire

[1] The methodological background of the following considerations is postcritical literary theory, in order to formulate some remarks on perceptions and cartographies in which constructivist perspectives are supplemented or balanced by postconstructivist standpoints. Discursive analysis of literature is in dialogue with ways of reading that do justice to literary relations to non-discursive realities (see 2–6 and 7).

field of sensibility with this pattern of perception. Political novels can then draw our attention to the possibility of critically analysing these perceptions and train our suspicious minds to detect manipulative practises. Finally, the most intriguing political novels decide to take one step further. They turn into machineries in which some perceptual skills are developed through the novel itself, confronting both the 'royal' perceptions of the hegemonic powers and the suspicious perceptions of the critical dissidents. The novelistic perceptual play of the motifs, their repeated appearance and their variations are intended to emancipate the reader's perceptual capacity to a certain degree, to enable them to act as free political actors and to create new spaces for their possible communities. The novel as a form of liberation of perceptual capacities and the intensification of these perceptual capacities becomes a means of rethinking and co-creating these new spaces. This becomes particularly clear when we think of the book written by the Czech dissident who was forced to leave his country after the failed democratic revolution.

To make some further comments on the way in which the political novels can help to recreate spaces for new possible communities, we need to consider the spatial and cartographic manoeuvres undertaken in this particular genre. It is easy to foresee that these manoeuvres would also bring the political novel into a triple or threefold relationship with political practises.

First, they analyse (or, in worse cases, participate in) the process of conquest and possession of a territory in geographical, sociological and other terms. Cartography is one of the tools used by the hegemonic power to establish itself in a country and control the occupied territory, and has therefore often been criticised. The iconic image conveys the desire to take possession of the centre of the Czechoslovak capital and to gain solid control over the entire territory of the country in order to stand in the 'eye-in-the sky'-position of a panoptic controller. The cartographic coverage of the entire country is typical of the imaginary of political novels supporting the regimes.

Second, in some cases the political novel participates in or notices acts of resistance and subversion of the dominant cartographic practises of hegemonic powers. There, cartography is treated as purely constructed, artificial, or at best the result of someone else's interpretation. These political novels trace possibilities of deterritorialisation – to use Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's term (see 9) – as in the case of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the misleading journey of the dissident who escapes the control of the spying secret service agents. Any attempt by cartography to fully map the country and extend the control of power over the citizens is in such cases undermined or mocked causing power to lose its solid grounding. The counter-cartographic intention is a dominant aim of this political novel. Its spatial cartographic representation is inherently interpretative, narrative and constructivist – it is the result of the discursive illusion and the performative practises of rhetoric. To fully achieve the critical intention, this idea of cartography resembles the famous story by Jorge Luis Borges, in which the map is indistinguishable from the covered land itself. One cannot distinguish what is a 'real' map and what is a real land, any act of grounding power hangs in a vacuum.

Thirdly, the political novel has a potential – albeit not always utilised – to be part of practises that go beyond this opposition and seek a sphere that Alain Badiou would call the "subtraction" (see 10) of the revealed opposition. In this third activity, the political novel is an agent that creates effective and useful political cartographies, which seems necessary if one wants to plan and carry out an intervention. Its ontology would be the greatest challenge, because we must understand the political novel as using, in some situational contexts, invented and different models (as defined by Alva Noë, see 11), miniatures, copies, substitutes, graphs, dummies, pattern volumes and other forms of representation and cartography that are part of some practises. Here the constant play between materialisation and dematerialisation of the represented continues. The political novels seem to be embedded in numerous everyday activities where material models are constantly produced and used as constellations of objects when we explain how to get somewhere, or as schematic pictures we draw for a random user to help them find their way around a place. This also means that in order to uncover this kind of political cartographic activity of the novel, we also need to change the way we reflect on literary forms.

In his new reading of Bruno Schulz, the Polish critic Paweł Tomczok pays attention to the fact that the story shows a miniature of the city described by the narrator. This prompts him to look at the ontology of the narrator of the story itself (see 12). Similar to the play of materialisation and dematerialisation of the worlds depicted in the model called miniature, the narrator is also treated as involved in the constant drama of his presence/absence. There are moments when the narrator is only an abstract dimension of the text, as most contemporary theories would have us believe, but in other cases he obviously shows his bodily gestures, comments on the timbre of his voice and behaves like a narrator from the oral tradition of literature. The story is thus to be read as a sequence of materialisations and dematerialisations of the narrator. If the narrator and other novelistic instances were treated in this way – that is, in a way that comes close to what has already been called 'postcritical literary studies' – then the novel dealing with political issues, could be usefully studied as a valuable practise of political cartography.

In the case of Kundera's novel, we should consider the status of its metanarrative parts. They not only undermine the illusion of the reality of the political world depicted, or reveal its fictional features, but also introduce a kind of writer's workshop in which the novelistic reality is being modelled. Kundera's narrator tells us how and why he creates some characters, where he is and what knowledge he already has about the composition of the novel, including his intentions regarding the characters and his hesitations or feelings. Here, too, we follow a constant drama of the narrator's presence and absence, his materialisation and dematerialisation. Another example is the material archives presented in the book. Some of the characters are in search of the lost letters that contain a precious part of their past. The

same could be said about the photographs, such as the initial picture of Gottwald and Clementis. In a story about students trying to understand the play *Rhinoceros* by Eugène Ionesco, there is an important scene in which the students perform part of the drama unsuccessfully. In all these cases, we can observe practises of dealing with the material carriers of some representations of the world.

Why should we trace this balancing of the political novels in the material and immaterial characteristics of cartographic images? I would answer that in politics you are always – to a certain extent – dealing with substances, materials, countries, bodies or properties. This field cannot be limited or reduced to its discursive or linguistic representations. For this reason, some of the political novels are involved in processes of materialisation and dematerialisation, where cartography is also understood as a broad field of everyday practises of schematic outlining, situational drawings, the creation of miniatures and simplified models. We always need some cartographic tools and we always produce them in order to intervene effectively in the world around us, in its discursive and material qualities. The cartographies of political novels are usually aware of their abstract and constructed character and they still pay attention to violating and oppressive influences of the 'hard' or solid cartography of the dominant powers. But they do not cease to continue their own cartographic endeavours as they create many new "graphs, maps, trees" (to use the title of Franco Moretti's monograph, see 13) to operate with given symbolic and material substances and experimentally map some new spaces for political activity. Kundera's novels are always about the search for a balance between the lightness and heaviness of being. His novels introduce us to the tension between these two unavoidable ontologies of political cartography and prepare us to navigate it. To be a conscious and active agent in this process or tension, the novel provides us with a special perceptual training, helps us to maximise our focus on these phenomena and teaches us how to study and use them in our possible future activities.

There is, however, at least one other aspect of this threefold involvement of political novels in spatial and cartographic action, which has become increasingly apparent in recent times, when studies of the new temporalities in literature are developing rapidly. The passage from Kundera's book had strongly emphasised the importance of temporal experience in relation to political events. We could call it, using Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton's term, as the "cartography of time" (see 14), where the political implications of spatial activities are fused with the political implications of temporal activities.

This allows me to move on to my second example, the book by the French writer Annie Ernaux, *Les années* (*The Years*, 2017). I do not think about this case without hesitation, because her autobiographical prose is more informal and less like the classic novel compared to Kundera's book. Nevertheless, the main pattern of the narrative is borrowed from the canonical novel *Une Vie* (*A Life*) by Guy de Maupassant, in which the life of a single woman is presented in a grand political and historical panorama. However, it is too tempting for me not to comment on this example, because the writer's entry into the political sphere of her time is a series of idiosyncratic perceptions, intensities of past images, intensities of past voices, intensities of past words, songs, etc. The book begins and ends with an enumeration of the loose and disorganised representations of some unforgettable perceptions and sensations of materialities. Let me now explain why these perceptual streams of private and public life events, analogous to Kundera's composition, strengthen the reader's perceptual capacity. It would be easy to find paragraphs in which Ernaux lets the perceptual impressions of the regime of Charles de Gaul or Nicolas Sarkozy sink into the narrative. The same could be said of her involvement in the feminist resistance and revolts, some of which were very successful and effectively and critically subverted the regime's perceptions. The same could be said of Ernaux's attitude to cartography. She has perfectly depicted the French cartographic hegemonic obsession revealed during the Algerian War, when maps were used as tools of the dominating colonial power. We can also see how the female subject in the male cultural system forced her to look for some deterritorialisations with which she could completely subvert the patriarchal mapping of social orders. This eventually led her to write the story in which she created her own cartographies using the material carriers such as photographs, family films and many other common and tangible models. Apart from this, her book was also intended to develop the cartographic affordances of the political novel in some selected temporal images. This interference of spatial and temporal substances and symbolisations could be called a novelistic 'cartography of time', which we may recognise in the following paragraphs:

> If we tried to enumerate the things that happened outside us, after September 11 we saw a rash of swift-moving events, a series of expectations and fears, interminable times and explosions that paralyzed or deeply distressed us – "nothing will be as it was before" was the dominant theme – and then disappeared, forgotten, unresolved, and commemorated a year or even a month later, as if they were ancient history. There was April 21, the war in Iraq, which fortunately did not include us, and the death of John Paul II, another pope whose name we hadn't retained, let alone his number, the bombing of the Atocha station, the great festive evening for the No vote in the European Constitution referendum, the incendiary nights of rioting in the banlieue, Florence Aubenas, the London terrorist attacks, the Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah, the Indian Ocean tsunami, Saddam rooted out of a hole and hanged (no one knew when), nebulous epidemics, SARS, avian flu, the chikungunya virus […]. Everything seemed overwhelming. The United States was the master of time and space, which it occupied according to its needs and interests. Everywhere the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. People slept in tents all along the Boulevard Périphérique. The young sneered "Welcome to a world of shit" and briefly rebelled. Only the retired were satisfied, and sought

> advice on how to save and spend their money, traveled to Thailand, shopped on eBay, and visited Meetic online dating. Where could revolt come from? (15 on page 142–43)
>
> What matters to her, on the contrary, is to seize this time that comprises her life on Earth at a given period, the time that has coursed through her, the world she has recorded merely by living. She has mined her intuition of what her book's form will be from another sensation, the one that engulfs her when, starting with a frozen memory-image of herself with other kids on a hospital bed after tonsil surgery, after the war, or crossing Paris on a bus in July of '68, she seems to melt into an indistinct whole whose parts she manages to pull free, one at a time, through an effort of critical consciousness: elements of herself, customs, gestures, words, etc. The tiny moment of the past grows and opens onto a horizon, at once mobile and uniform in tone, of one or several years. Then, in a state of profound, almost dazzling satisfaction, she finds something that the image from personal memory doesn't give her on its own: a kind of vast collective sensation that takes her consciousness, her entire being, into itself. She has the same feeling, alone in the car on the highway, of being taken into the indefinable whole of the world of now, from the closest to the most remote of things.
>
> So her book's form can only emerge from her complete immersion in the images from her memory in order to identify, with relative certainty, the specific signs of the times, the years to which the images belong, gradually linking them to others; to try to hear the words people spoke, what they said about events and things, skim it off the mass of floating speech, that hubbub that tirelessly ferries the wordings and rewordings of what we are and what we must be, think, believe, fear, and hope. All that the world has impressed upon her and her contemporaries she will use to reconstitute a common time, the one that made its way through the years of the distant past and glided all the way to the present. By retrieving the memory of collective memory in an individual memory, she will capture the lived dimension of History. (15 on page 150–51)

This longer quotation once again opens up the threefold relationship of the political novel to temporal questions. We have an example of a dominant power, the United States, dominating time and space globally in the first decade of the new millennium. The book also refers to some other masters of time, namely economic and marketing strategies that synchronise temporal rhythms on a global scale. The helplessness of this situation, in which no revolt is possible, leads to a bitter and critical counter-narrative of the radically asynchronous and chaotic mass of events. This kind of narrative prevents, to a certain extent, the influences of the global cartography of time. It exposes its totalising, homogeneous, hurtful and constructed ontology. And this is where Ernaux decides to go one step further. In all these years, she could not begin her story about herself as a woman in time because she had no basic perception or reason that could be distinguished from this overwhelming mass of events and their imposed perceptions. Instead of reproducing the media and political images and instead of merely melancholically subverting them, she had to transform her book, as we could read, into a machinery that maximised her idiosyncratic sensations of peculiar personal images of time, studying their intensity and thus liberating her perceptive faculties. The moment of immersion in the frozen images of the past was associated with the sensation of melting the materiality of these images, loosely dissolving them and recovering the consciousness of this time, of sharing all substances with others. This is all the more radical when we consider how worthless these materialities of time can be decades later, when they are no longer a commodity for others.

In order to achieve this kind of temporal liberation of the past, Ernaux must perceive it as a material mass of impulses. This is why she even uses the metaphor of 'tone' and we could associate her writing to the mood or atmosphere in a literary work, something that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has taken up again for literary studies by emphasising its importance for the dimension of presence (see 16). This is exactly what seems to happen in the quoted paragraphs, the liberating potential of the idiosyncratic perception of the past event is tied to its fleeting presence, or more precisely: To the immersion in its increasingly felt interplay of presence and absence (latency, as Gumbrecht would put it). The main aim of Ernaux's narrative is "to reconstitute a common time" and this time is common if it has some material properties that can be derived from the image. The time is common because each substance was basically common in a certain time, which is even more vivid after decades in which they have usually lost their significance for the political cartographies of the 'masters'. And this strange ontological-temporal materiality opens up the possibility of drawing trajectories of common time, in which we associate spatial and temporal activities with substances, properties or bodies. Ernaux presents her own trajectory, but also invites us to read other political novels as other trajectories, all of which together develop cartographies of time formed by the activists of common time.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise once again the gradual involvement of the political novels in questions of perception. The main reason for this involvement is the tendency of every power to control the entire field of perception, be it political, economic, social, religious or otherwise. The political novels usually portray this tendency, but in the most servant cases they also help the regime to reproduce itself by hurting the lives of the citizens in perception. This harmful influence leads many political novels to elaborate a critical and suspicious analysis of these 'royal' perceptions, training readers to expose the perceptual manipulations of those in power. The most productive seem to be the political novels that add another aspect to this opposition, and our analysis should be ready to support them in this ambition. They turn into enhancements of our perceptual capacities and rely on our growing perceptual skills in their aim to pave the way for

an independent activist cartography and a cartography of time for possible political action. To achieve this goal, they need to change our usual way of dealing with literary texts. They are not purely discursive and linguistically abstract forms, but also engage with the interplay of the linguistic and materialistic features of composition. In this way, political novels can intervene in the cartographic field and become more and more aware of how they can effectively combine the constant drama of their discursive and material properties to design new cartographies and new cartographies of time for successful future democratic activities.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No data associated with this article.

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Perceptual Machines and Literary Cartographies

Summary
Tomasz Mizerkiewicz's article proposes a stimulating and ambitious itinerary: to explore the political novel not only as a literary artefact, but as a perceptual and cartographic dispositif—a machine capable of replicating, challenging, or liberating political perception. The essay aims to reposition the political novel within a "threefold" matrix of perceptual relations: novels that reproduce hegemonic visions; novels that critique and deconstruct them; and, finally, novels that intensify perception and generate emancipatory political possibilities. By drawing a parallel with spatial and temporal cartographies—especially in the works of Kundera and Ernaux—the paper enters a fertile but dangerous interdisciplinary zone. As this review will argue, the cartographic conceptualization remains largely metaphorical, and would benefit from a deeper engagement with contemporary cartographic humanities. Through closer attention to authors like Ernaux and Kundera, and their treatment of memory, time, and perception, the article could more effectively position the political novel as an insurgent cartographic form—one that generates new perceptual and political geographies rather than merely representing existing ones.

For a humanist map scholar, in a time of geopolitical cartographic overexposure, the proposal to explore the political novel not only as a literary artefact but as a perceptual and cartographic dispositif—a machine capable of replicating, challenging, or liberating political perception—is certainly timely and ambitious.

The essay, in particular, aims to reposition the political novel within a "threefold" matrix of perceptual relations: novels that reproduce hegemonic visions; novels that critique and deconstruct them; and finally—and most compellingly—novels that function as perceptual laboratories, activating emancipatory faculties in the reader. By drawing a parallel with spatial and temporal cartographies—especially in the works of Kundera and Ernaux—the paper enters a

fertile interdisciplinary zone. Yet, as this review will argue, the cartographic conceptualization remains largely metaphorical and would benefit from a deeper engagement with post-representational cartography (Dodge et al., 2009) and contemporary cartographic humanities (Rossetto and Lo Presti, 2024).

My emphasis on mapping is not meant to be pretentious, but the title obsessively signals an alignment with the "cartographic turn" in the humanities, and the essay gestures toward the analytical promise of concepts like "cartographies of time" and "counter-mapping." However, these concepts remain only partially sketched and are used in a rather superficial way. Despite references to Franco Moretti, Deleuze and Guattari, Badiou, and Grafton & Rosenberg (who are not geographers nor cartographers), the framework lacks engagement with a growing body of literature that directly theorizes the map-text nexus—and more.

In sum, while the intuition is promising, the articulation remains tentative. The conceptual movement between literature and mapping is evoked rather than constructed. And this matters, especially when claiming to chart a new critical itinerary between narrative and power.
To read the novel as a map is not new. Yet this piece seems unaware of the sedimented scholarship that would allow it to stand on firmer ground. Cultural geographers, literary theorists, and post-representational cartographers have already traced, layered, and counter-mapped this terrain (and it is surprising not to see any mention of their work).

The article does not reference key figures in critical cartography, who have long interrogated the ideological and technical regimes embedded in map-making. Where are the epistemological breaks initiated by Brian Harley's critique of cartographic objectivity? Or Matthew Edney's historical unpacking of the "ideals" of map-making? Or Akerman's work on colonial and postcolonial cartography? Or even Herb's research on the cartographic construction of Germany and Eastern Europe? Without this background, it is difficult to distinguish between what is structurally cartographic and what is simply spatial or perceptual in literary form. Terms like "deterritorialization," "counter-cartography," or "new possible communities" are deployed without analytical precision. The transitions between metaphors (from map to miniature, archive to diagram) are too rapid, and the application to literary texts remains too abstract. The author's reference to Borges's tale of the map as territory is evocative but could have been strengthened by a dialogue with post-representational cartography, where maps are treated not as (false) images of reality, but as performative tools of world-making.

Without a deliberate engagement with these traditions, the proposed bridge between novelistic form and cartographic modes remains suspended—conceptually adrift.
More broadly, the article's claim to originality would benefit from the vocabulary and methodological openness developed in the field of counter-mapping—especially where map and narrative intersect as spaces of resistance or care, capable of representing lived, embodied, and affective geographies of empowerment and endurance. Counter-mapping, as practiced by Indigenous groups, activist cartographers, and feminist geographers, is not just subversion; it is a reappropriation of mapping techniques to produce alternative spatial knowledges. In this sense, Ernaux's reclaiming of time through memory fragments could have been framed as a **chronotopic** counter-map—a form of temporal insurgency against the linear histories imposed by state and media.

Ernaux gestures toward a cartography of time, but the author does not engage with chrono-

cartographic practices or the broader discussion on temporal geographies (e.g., Tally 2019; Lammes et al., 2018). The palimpsestic timescapes of Ernaux deserve closer attention—not merely as narrative devices, but precisely because they are modes of resisting linear historicity and nation-bound chronologies. A dialogue with thinkers such as Barbara Adam or Reinhart Koselleck could help flesh out this dimension.

When reading the brief quotation from Ernaux, I could begin to see how it might be explained as a kind of perceptual cartogenesis—or even a micropolitical cartography of memory.

Here the paper begins to speak the language of contemporary cartographic humanities, where maps are not only spatial diagrams but expressive practices, performances, and forms entangled with affect, memory, and subjectivity.
How, for instance, does Ernaux's fragmentary style affect perception—and even construct fragmentary maps? What does it mean, for instance, for Ernaux to "map" time? How is this mapping different from the techniques used by state chronologies or historical archives? Without this differentiation, the cartographic analogy remains static and uncritical. How does Kundera's ironic detachment map a form of perceptual critique? Without close readings, the theoretical ambition floats in abstraction.

To reposition the article within a fertile interdisciplinary constellation, one could reframe its key thesis as follows: political novels do not merely represent power—they territorialize it, subvert it, or unmap it. They operate like maps: delimiting, orienting, distorting, or opening new perceptual affordances. Some novels act like topographic instruments of control, others like cartographies of suspicion, and the most radical as insurgent maps: open-ended, unstable, affectively charged.
I believe that we need to abandon the idea of the novel as a mirror and embrace it as a cartographic machine: not mimetic, but generative. The reader is invited not to receive the world, but to re-world it. This gesture, if expanded, could resonate with current debates in post-representational cartography (see Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins, 2009), which now finds a significant place within the cartographic humanities (Rossetto and Lo Presti, 2024).

The opportunity here is not only to re-read novels through the lens of cartography, but to perform a fresh, updated mapping critique of the literary, where the act of reading itself becomes an act of situated mapping—sensory, political, and always partial.
Mizerkiewicz's article offers a provocative framework for rethinking political novels as cartographic agents of perception. Its strongest contributions lie in its focus on perceptual emancipation and the novel as a training device for political subjectivity. Yet to achieve the conceptual clarity and originality it aspires to, the paper must revise its cartographic lexicon, draw more extensively on the literature of critical mapping, and better integrate theory with close reading.

To do so would not only strengthen its scholarly rigor, but also allow it to genuinely "co-create new spaces" where literary analysis, geography, and politics intersect—something deeply resonant with the ongoing project of the cartographic humanities.

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Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
No

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Partly

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: I am a cultural geographer, expert in cultural mapping, cartographic humanities, critical cartography and their use in art, literature, media (and humanities more broadly).

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 23 June 2025

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Alina Bako
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

This article aims for an ambitious goal, promising to reveal cartographies that are, however, only sketched out. Although the chosen corpus is highly rich, consisting of Milan Kundera's and Annie Ernaux's books, the promise is not fully fulfilled. Current working tools are discussed, which could lead to an understanding of literature from an innovative perspective. Nevertheless, the article uses fragments of concepts, such as those from Moretti's seminal study or the phrase “the cartographies of time,” which could have been related to the political chronotop, without justifying their presence or the role that the political novel might hold in a potential diagrammatic scheme, of a genealogical type.
Passages such as “The novel aims to become a unique tool for long-term study, in which the composition and repetition of perceptions should lead to an awareness of them, increase the intensity of the phenomena studied and maximise concentration on them. The novel strengthens the reader’s perceptive capacity and prepares him or her for independent activity, including in the political sphere.” contain redundancies and do not clarify the meaning that the article initially promised. We do not understand how a novel would become a tool for long-term study. The discussion then shifts to the public and private spheres, without explaining how Kundera's novel is perceived within these two contexts or what the author's view on this is.
The article also includes elements that need to be reformulated and re-discussed according to scientific standards. What does “new possible communities” mean, and what is meant by “we need to consider the spatial and cartographic manoeuvres undertaken in this particular genre”? We cannot follow a logical analytical process. “It is easy to foresee that these manoeuvres would also bring the political novel into a triple or threefold relationship with political practises,” the author writes, which reflects a confusion of ideas.
The author does not sufficiently clarify how the concept of “deteritorialization”(Guattari and Deleuze) is explained and applied, especially considering that it pertains to an escape from “organized/striated space.” Similarly, the phrase “counter-cartographic” is used but not explained, especially since it does not apply to the chosen novel.
We cannot reconcile statements from narratology such as the definition of narrator as “an abstract dimension of the text” with the one related to presence through “his bodily gestures, comments on the timbre of his voice, and behaving like a narrator from the oral tradition of literature.” In the selected novels, as much of literary criticism has pointed out, we are dealing with a clearly abstract narrator, which cannot be negotiated.

Such statements as “cartographic hegemonic obsession revealed during the Algerian War, when maps were used as tools of the dominating colonial power” should be developed further, as they fall within the arguments that the author initially announced they would explain.

The conclusion does not clarify the argument “To achieve this goal, they need to change our usual way of dealing with literary texts,” as the author does not explain how this change occurs or how this article proposes an alternative method of analyzing the novel.

My recommendation is that the article should be revised extensively before being indexed. The primary focus of these revisions should be on achieving greater conceptual clarity. Currently, the article introduces some theoretical concepts and references, but these are often presented without clear definitions or precise explanations of how they relate to the overall argument. Clarifying these ideas and selecting appropriate analytical tools will strengthen the foundation of the research, making it easier for readers to follow and appreciate the critical contribution.
Once the conceptual framework is clarified, the next step should involve carefully applying these refined concepts to the two selected novels. The current treatment of the novels appears somewhat superficial and fragmented, lacking a coherent connection between theory and literary analysis. By clearly demonstrating how the concepts function in relation to these specific texts, the article would provide a more substantive and nuanced interpretation. This application should serve to illustrate and test the validity of the theoretical framework, ensuring that the analysis remains focused and relevant.
Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from this application should be both pertinent and insightful, avoiding redundancy or superficial remarks. They should synthesize the findings from the textual analysis and relate them back to the initial theoretical premises. Well-constructed conclusions will also help highlight the original contributions of the paper, showcasing new perspectives or understandings about the novels under consideration and their relation to broader literary or cultural themes.
In summary, the article's indexing should be contingent on a thorough revision process that emphasizes conceptual precision, careful application of theory to the texts, and well-founded, meaningful conclusions. Such a structured approach will enhance the scholarly value of the work, ensuring it makes a clear, coherent, and original contribution to the field. This will also make the article more accessible and useful to other researchers interested in literary studies and the specific themes addressed.

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?
Yes

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?
Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?
Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?
Partly

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: World Literature Studies, Cultural Studies, Geocriticism, Literary Studies

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 30 May 2025

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Dawit Dibekulu
Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Clarity and Presentation
The manuscript is lucid, well-organized, and demonstrates a clear line of argumentation. It moves coherently from theoretical framing to textual analysis, maintaining an academic tone that remains accessible to an interdisciplinary readership. The prose is elegant yet precise, and the structure allows readers to follow the author's conceptual progression with ease.
Impact and Novelty
The article offers a compelling and innovative contribution to literary and political theory. Its central proposition—a threefold interpretive model for political novels—presents a valuable analytical tool:

1. Reproduction of hegemonic perceptions,
2. Critical exposure of ideological manipulations, and
3. Emancipatory cartographies.

Especially noteworthy is the concept of **"cartographies of time,"** which opens fresh dialogue between literary studies, temporality, and spatial-political theory. This synthesis is both original and intellectually generative.
Methodological Rigor
The manuscript demonstrates commendable methodological depth. Theoretical grounding in postcritical literary theory (Rita Felski, Stephen Best), temporal and spatial studies (Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Rosenberg & Grafton) is robust. The close readings of Kundera and Ernaux are richly textured and persuasive, successfully marrying theory with textual detail.
Alignment of Conclusions
The conclusions flow logically from the analysis. However, the third category—**"emancipatory cartographies"**—would benefit from greater empirical or historical grounding. Presenting at least one concrete example of how a political novel has influenced democratic movements or civic discourse would enhance the argument's applied dimension.
2. Detailed Section-by-Section Review
Title

- **Strengths**: The title is clear, compelling, and rich in thematic keywords.
- **Suggestion**: For searchability and precision, consider adding the names *Kundera* and *Ernaux* to the title.

Abstract

- **Strengths**: The abstract succinctly outlines the article's objectives, method, and significance.
- **Suggestion**: Define "cartographies of time" more clearly for non-specialists to ensure accessibility across disciplines.

Introduction

- **Strengths**: Strong contextualization of gaps in existing scholarship, especially regarding political temporality in fiction.
- **Suggestion**: A brief acknowledgment of critiques of postcritique (e.g., Marxist or ideological theory-based concerns) would provide a more balanced theoretical positioning.

Methods

- **Strengths**: Methodology is appropriate for a humanities article—blending theoretical analysis with interpretive close reading.
- **Suggestion**: Explicitly justify the choice of Kundera and Ernaux. Framing them as exemplars of dissident and feminist writing would enhance methodological transparency.

Results and Discussion

- **Strengths**:
  - The reading of Kundera's *"fur cap"* episode is especially evocative and analytically rich.
  - Ernaux's fragmented temporality and affective memory politics are interpreted with sensitivity and originality.
- **Critiques**:
  1. The transition between the Kundera and Ernaux sections is abrupt. A bridging paragraph highlighting a shared theme (e.g., materiality, affect, or resistance) would help unify the case studies.
  2. The emancipatory dimension remains somewhat abstract. The author could strengthen this section by referencing a real-world impact (e.g., Kundera's role in Czech dissent or Ernaux's influence on feminist memory politics).
  3. The notion of "cartographies of time" would benefit from engaging more directly with recent work on temporality in literature, such as Mark Currie's *About Time* or Elizabeth Freeman's *Chrononormativity*.

Tables, Figures, and Primary Material

- **Comment**: Although the article lacks visual data, the textual excerpts are well-integrated and support the argument effectively.

References

- **Strengths**: The bibliography is comprehensive and includes relevant, recent works.
- **Suggestion**: For balance, include references that critically examine postcritical approaches (e.g., *The Limits of Critique* by Felski or essays from its symposium responses).

3. Final Recommendations

Major Revisions

1. Expand on the "emancipatory cartographies" with a case study or historical example demonstrating how literary temporalities can incite democratic engagement.
2. Deepen engagement with contemporary temporal theory (e.g., Currie, Freeman) to solidify the novelty of "cartographies of time."
3. Briefly respond to critiques of postcritique to pre-empt objections and enrich the theoretical discourse.

Minor Revisions

1. Smooth the Kundera–Ernaux transition with a thematic link sentence.
2. Clarify the term “cartographies of time” in both the abstract and introduction for broader readability.
3. Consider adjusting the title for keyword optimization and discoverability.

Strengths to Retain

- The three-part framework is conceptually robust and offers a new lens for literary political analysis.
- The close readings are meticulous, theoretically sophisticated, and well-matched to the central argument.
- The interdisciplinary engagement is commendable and could stimulate cross-domain academic dialogue.

4. Overall Assessment

This manuscript is a rigorous and thought-provoking contribution to the fields of literary theory, politics, and temporal studies. Its innovative framework and elegant textual analysis ensure it will resonate with scholars interested in literature’s relationship to power, perception, and temporality. With revisions to clarify and support its most ambitious claims, the article is well-suited for *Open Research Europe*

Is the work original in terms of material and argument?

Partly

Does it sufficiently engage with relevant methodologies and secondary literature on the topic?

Partly

Is the work clearly and cogently presented?

Yes

Is the argument persuasive and supported by evidence?

Yes

If any, are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Yes

Does the research article contribute to the cultural, historical, social understanding of the field?

Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Dawit Dibekulu Alem is an Assistant Professor at Bahir Dar University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature. He was born in Ethiopia and completed his BA in English Language and Literature at Woldia University. He accomplished his MA in TEFL at Debre Markos University in Debre Markos, Ethiopia, and holds a PhD from Bahir Dar University. Dawit is a member of the Reviewer Board for several international journals, including

the International Journal of Psychology and Counselling, International Journal of Learning, Teaching, and Educational Research, African Educational Research Journal, Journal of Engineering Research and Reports, International Research Journals, International Journal of English and Literature, and the ACTA Scientific Computer Sciences Review Board. Additionally, he serves on the Editorial Board of PLOS ONE. His research interests include language assessment, literature, language-learning strategies, CALL, material development, psychology, educational psychology, curriculum and syllabus design, social sciences, and other language-related areas. Dawit has published articles in various domestic and international journals and presented papers at numerous conferences.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.