SPATIALISATION OF NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES THROUGH INTERTEXTUAL READING

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Abstract

This paper explores spatial strategies created through a non-linear continuity of narratives, instead of chronological ones. It employs the creation of multiple narrative possibilities by spatialisation mechanism as a new way of reading an intertextual narrative. This research explores different themes of spatial narratives based on the book *Penguin Hate Stuff* by Greg Stones. The study utilises the mechanism of spatial manipulation using horizontal and vertical axis towards the episodic events portrayed in the book, questioning the original intertextuality of the book's text, and opening up multiple re-interpretations. The explorations of non-linear narratives demonstrate strategies of spatialisation based on the stitched landscape, the opposition of roles, and collective multiverse possibilities. This study expands the current practice of narratives and architecture by re-reading narrative episodic events in a non-linear way, creating open-ended possibilities.

Keywords: narrative, non-linear, spatialisation, intertextuality, episodic events

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Introduction

This paper explores the spatialisation of non-linear narratives as a way to generate an alternative understanding of narrative and architecture that are multiple and open-ended. Narrative represents a movement within the coordination of space and time (Friedman, 1993). At the same time, narrative organises real or fictional events into a sequence the narrator recounts, which led to a shift of narrative definition as an entity with a level of meaning that substantiates the object while also signifying an animated inner quality (Coates, 2012). The engagement of the narrator in the narrative can be classified into two general modes: stationary or physically active (Austin, 2018). However, this study focuses solely on the stationary mode of the narrator or viewer in the unfolding of events.

This study argues that the linearity of sequence in a form of narrative has started to dissolve as changes in technology influences the narrative development from sequential writing to a digital one; and that every narrative form can be understood as a purely spatial organisation (Asselin et al., 2023). The nonlinearity of narrative discourse demonstrates alternative ways of addressing the relative movement and sequences of narrative and its spatial quality.

This study explores nonlinearity in narrative reading and how it generates spatial strategies that allow for multiple meanings and interpretations. It begins by discussing the nonlinearity of narrative in architectural discourse, the spatial quality of non-linear narratives, and spatial strategies that emerge from assembling a form of narrative sequence in a non-linear way. Using *Penguin Hate Stuff* graphic novel as a potential case study for non-linear reading, the study then discusses various spatial strategy that produces nonlinearity of sequence.

Narrative, architecture, and nonlinearity

Focusing on the idea of sequence, Coates (2012) states that a narrative is told in a structured way and such structured reading is achieved by following chronological progress or a chain of ideas. A narrative is created by shaping and simplifying events into a sequence that contains some 'other' existence in parallel with its function comprised of three sets: binary, sequence, and biotopic (Coates, 2012). However, this study argues that the sequence of re-telling a narrative can be questioned. Tschumi (1994) suggested how spatial and programmatic sequences can be "analysed, dismantled, deconstructed according to any rule or criteria, and then reconstructed into another programmatic configuration" (pp. 24–25). What Tschumi proposed contrasted sharply with what Coates suggested as a chronological progression or a chain of ideas, laying out spaces along a predetermined route tying together several situations. Reversal of chronological progress is a form of narrative deconstruction, creating a form of narrative with an open-ended effect which belies a sense of completion (Coates, 2012). This study aims to reveal more about how Tschumi's suggestion of narrative sequences can be utilised to understand different understandings of architecture and narrative.

In understanding the nonlinearity of a narrative, this study highlights the importance of reading the narrative through its intertextual spatial quality (Friedman, 1993; Tschumi, 1994) In this sense, a narrative is not read solely through a singular text but through the relation of one text to another. In architectural narrative discourse, Tschumi describes intertextuality in a spatial way which is as a mix of spaces and using odd or unexpected configurations, intersecting spatial envelopes with movement vectors (Schafer & Lawrence, 2006).

In a non-linear narrative, the emergent spatial quality of intertextuality exists to provide multiple interpretations of meaning. In other words, new interpretations emerge due to the movements and events of interactions within a narrative. Tschumi argues that events cannot be designed but occurs unexpectedly (Schafer & Lawrence, 2006). Events can emerge from the sequence and derive significance from "juxtaposition" (Tschumi, 1994, p. 24). Following on the driver of events, Tschumi (1994) suggests that events intensify within the narrative by means of sequence manipulation, through various rules of transformation.

The outcome of such manipulation may produce "a fluid story of a dynamic text ever in process" (Friedman, 1993, p. 13). While Friedman's discussion serves as an outcome of nonlinearity narrative spatialisation, Tschumi's exploration is the driving factor of various characters of nonlinearity. Combinations of Tschumi's idea of intertextuality from architectural discourse and Friedman's ideas of spatialisation enable an understanding of how the nonlinearity of singular narratives with multiple spatialisation strategies can produce multiple meanings and experiences. In challenging the chronological sequence of the narrative, the narrator of an event is not bound by any rules except the non-linear proposition by the narrator. Such unboundedness creates flexibility and freedom for the narratives to be read with multiple meanings and in an open-ended way. The following section discusses such potential of non-linear through re-reading and re-interpreting the narrative in the form of graphic novels.

Finding the intertextuality of graphic novels

This study explores graphic novels as a potential form of non-text narratives with sequences that can be challenged and re-read in a non-linear way. Historically, narrative in the form of a graphic novel has not been "a legitimate object of cultural analysis and has been confined to the intellectual margins" (Frey & Noys, 2002, p. 255). This marginal position stemmed from the fact that they are "hybrid forms that mix text and images" (Frey & Noys, 2002, p. 255).

The term graphic novel itself is an evolution from the notion of comics. The hybridity of text and images was altered by the term "co-mix" by Art Spiegelman to "elevate its status as a potential art instead of a discredited one" (Frey & Noys, 2002, p. 256). Along with such use of terms, the evolution of substance in graphic novels shifted from merely "a humorous tendency; to displaying

anti-authoritarianism, ethnic expression, philosophical depth, and serious aesthetic power which has not been previously exploited." (Tabachnick, 1993, p. 154)

One of the key ingredients utilised in the graphic novel is the "use of panels, which has visual and verbal devices embedded in sequential order" (Tabachnick, 1993, p. 157). Visual devices can be broken down into multiple sub-devices such as colour, diagrams, differentiation of actors, the play of perspectives to manipulate the viewer's point of view, different-sized panels, and layering of photographs (Tabachnick, 1993). Visual devices determine the viewer's eye movement and time duration in each panel, while verbal devices include narration, dialogue, and sound effects listed as part of the narrative.

The potential of nonlinearity in graphic novels exists due to its limitation of verbal devices. In its evolution, the use of text in the graphic novel has been reduced, emphasising scrutiny and reader tolerance (Ball & Kuhlman, 2010). It is thus argued that when verbal devices are non-existent, there is an opportunity to re-read the narrative in a non-linear way.

Kristeva in Friedman (1993) suggested that reading a narrative without linearity can be achieved by altering the intertextual "spatialisation" of the narrative within a grid, vertically, and horizontally (p. 13). From Tschumi and Friedman, it can be understood that exploring the spatialisation of a non-linear narrative can be done by navigating the movement vectors of the narrative itself, creating non-linear intertextuality. In exploring the nonlinearity of graphic novels, re-creating the horizontal and vertical navigation of the panels' grid allow the exploitation of its visual devices, creating the juxtaposition and multi-interpretation of the narrative. For example, exploitation towards the graphic novels' panels may create the effect of supporting or undercutting the reader's reaction (Tabachnick, 1993); develop the tension between immersion and in-motion, contemplation and exploration (Lu, 2010); or demonstrate conflict and paradox rather than order and cohesion (Mitnick, 2008).

It is argued that spatialising the narrative in a non-linear way enables the 'other voices' to emerge, and by doing so, potentially give voice to all the actors involved (Atmodiwirjo et al., 2019). These other voices are created by the new and multiple interpretations arising from the nonlinearity itself, thus potentially expanding the idea of the sequence in narrative and architecture.

Methods of spatialising the non-linear narratives

This paper explores the mechanism of spatialising a non-linear narrative using a children's graphic novel, titled *Penguin Hate Stuff* (Stones, 2013). The book provides 55 different episodic events in which a penguin (or penguins) engages in different activities with other peculiar actors within a particular context within each panel. From one page to the next, there is no evidence of a clear unifying theme or storyline connecting these events except for the same actors within. Such a lack of a unifying theme becomes a potential for a non-linear reading of

the narrative. The landscape, activities, and other actors present in the book provide different possibilities of reading, which can be adopted as potential 'intertextual spatiality' within this book. The alteration of image sequences created in this study has been done with written permission from the author of the book. The following paragraphs will discuss the methods of performing such alteration further.

The first non-linear reading strategy is done by juxtaposing any possible connections using simply the continuity of context of the narrative in each episodic panel. Any episode of the event can be the first, the last, or in-between. While each event does not correlate, the continuity of context (in this case, the landscape) in which the actors participate provides an intertextual point of intersection between panels (Figure 1).
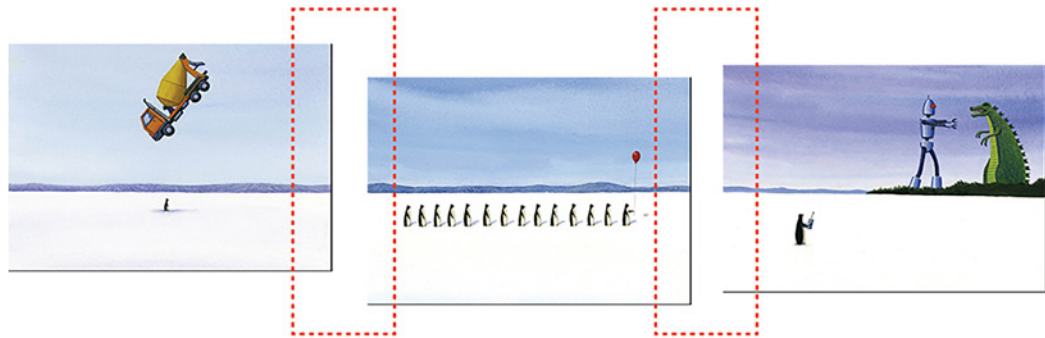
With the manipulation towards the panels and their intersections, an additional mechanism is required to achieve a more continuous narrative of such context. Based on Friedman's (1993) discussion on the vertical and horizontal grid, it is proposed that each point of intersection can be manipulated further by either moving each panel of event independently on the vertical or horizontal axis; by layering the events; or by scaling from one event to the next (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Point of intersection (Image by author)

Figure 2. Mechanism of spatialisation (Image by author)
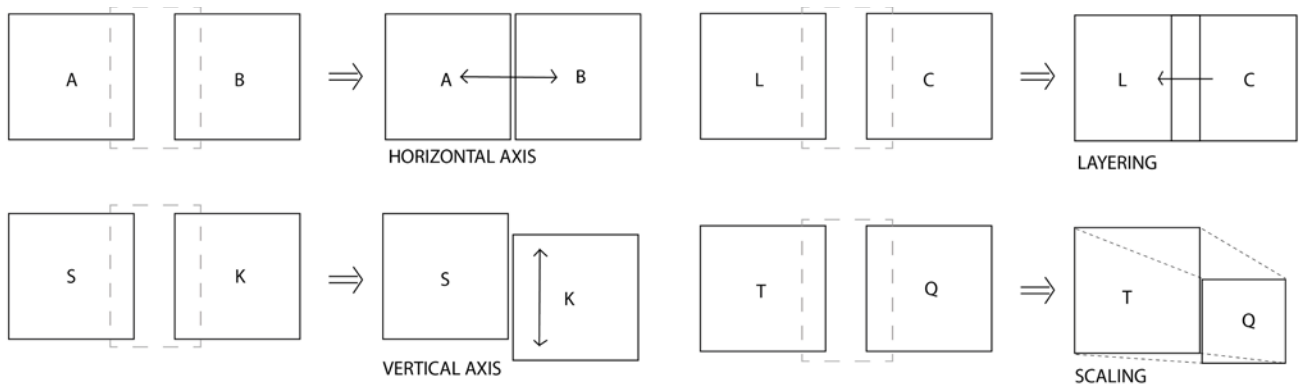
Another potential identification was made by reading the inherent narrative and finding any intersections that might present itself. While the book presents itself initially as a graphic novel, there is no conversation between actors within each episode. Such lack of conversation seems to be the deliberate choice by the author to "inspire lively discussions and open

previously unexplored avenues" (Ball & Kuhlman, 2010, p. IX). This study argues that it also allows embedded meanings and values beneath the surface as a form of the interiority of the narrative (Atmodiwirjo & Yatmo, 2020). This presents an exciting opportunity to create multiple open-ended narratives instead of relying on the pre-fixed situation. Following the discussion with Tschumi on narrative sequence manipulation, the derailment of the provided narrative is done by inserting my own interpretation. Table 1 scrutinises the events' inner narrative and generates multiple interpretations.

No	Image	Description	Insertion 1	Insertion 2
1		A group of penguins is playing with butterflies	Butterflies are feeding a group of penguins	A group of penguins is turning into butterflies
2		Two penguins are running uphill with a shark swimming upward	A robot with a shark fin is chasing penguins	They are racing to the top of the hill
3		Two penguins are holding wine glasses on a tiny snow island	A couple of penguins are celebrating their honeymoon	A couple of penguins is stranded on a floating island

Table 1. Insertion of narrative

The interpretations within each event can then be grouped without rules, allowing us to create multiple spatialisation narratives that are not based on the context but based on the events of the actors. Grouping can be determined by isolating the actors, isolating the actions, or both while excluding the landscape.

The above manipulation towards the context or the actors' events suggests an open space that includes various functions and storylines that are "mutually supporting yet independent" (Coates, 2012, p. 159). While Coates (2012) focuses on the polarity of worlds created by the multiplicity of a narrative, it is argued that exploration of non-linear narratives may be brought multiple worlds simultaneously. In a narrative with multiple interpretations, it is up to us to *fill in* the text while simultaneously receiving and interpreting the text provided. This process is a never-ending loop due to the "challenge and opportunity to say a lot in a little" (Tabachnick, 1993, p. 157) until the intertextuality diminishes at a certain point.

Non-linear narrative spatialisation of *Penguin Hate Stuff*

This study outlines three spatialisation strategies to read the narrative in a non-linear way based on the manipulation of context and the actors' narrative events discussed in the previous section. The strategies are stitched landscapes, opposite roles, and multiverse possibilities. Stitched landscape

focuses on the continuity of context; opposite roles manipulate the interpretation of actors and their events in the narrative; while multiverse possibilities aim to combine between continuity of context and alteration of events. The results from the spatialisation are not definitive due to the open interpretations of each event. This spatialisation process is done independently; free from any strict and defined rules, while at the same time still maintaining a reasonable and understandable narrative output.

Stiched landscape

The first reading strategy by spatialisation resulted in a stitching of nine events. The result is a slight deviation from the horizontal and vertical axes from the context provided (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Stitched landscape 01 (Image by author)

Figure 4 demonstrates the second attempt at stitching the landscape using other variations of episodic events in the book. However, the difference in context in these events is the snowy landscape with hills in the surrounding area or the background. The different topography in the background context gives another reading strategy such as scaling. Scaling of the panels is done on the third and the last events to create a seamless continuation in the spatialisation.

Figure 4. Stitched landscape 02 (Image by author)

With the additional manipulation strategies by layering and scaling, we can create a third stitched landscape that suggests sloping contours exist from the first event to the last one. In this particular result, a change in the landscape from a snowy hill with two different peaks sloping into a waterscape below is presented. Layering was employed between the third and fourth panels of events while scaling and layering were employed between the seventh and eighth panels of events (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Stitched landscape 03 (Image by author)

Opposite roles

In this exploration, several events that share a similar inner narrative are grouped together based on two opposite roles of the main actors within the overall narrative; which are either as the protagonist or as the antagonist. Such roles are examined by the position of the penguin in relation to other characters in the events as well as other objects present in the drawing.

In creating the narrative of the penguin as the protagonist, this study grouped three events shown in Figure 6, which demonstrates how the penguin is holding a weapon of choice in a heroic stand against a menacing foe: an alien, a Godzilla, a samurai, and a couple of bat-penguins. Contrary to stitched landscape, the context is not the primary consideration in how the panels are intersectionally connected in their horizontal or vertical axis. However, as the events show how the penguin fights its foe at different times of the day, this non-linear grouping shows that time contributes to a different interpretation as part of its intertextual narratives.

Figure 6. Reading the penguin as the protagonist (Image by author)

Developing the character of the penguin as the antagonists creates groups of events which show how the penguins are running away from different actors, suggesting that the penguins had committed mischievous acts as perpetrators. The victims consist of the rabbit, Leprechaun, and Tarzan; and in the first three panels, they are trying to reclaim what was originally and presumably theirs. In the last event, however, the penguin is trying to melt a snowman using a hairdryer, insinuating that the penguins are capable of hostile actions (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Reading the penguin as the antagonist (Image by author)

Multiverse possibilities

In multiverse possibilities strategies, we combine the spatialisation strategies from the two previous results; the spatialisation mechanism reading on context with events grouping to create alternative narratives. While all the events from the book are highly imaginative, the two attempts of spatialisation in this section aims to challenge the usual and presumed context of penguin further by (living in cold weather)

creating a different alternative context altogether for penguin; one in grassy prairie and the other one in the sandy desert.

The first reading result in the multiverse possibilities is the spatialisation of the stitched landscape of grassy and hilly prairie. This is the minor context where the leading actors participate or engage in various shenanigans. The questions of climate and sustainability of life are thrown out of the window (Figure 8).
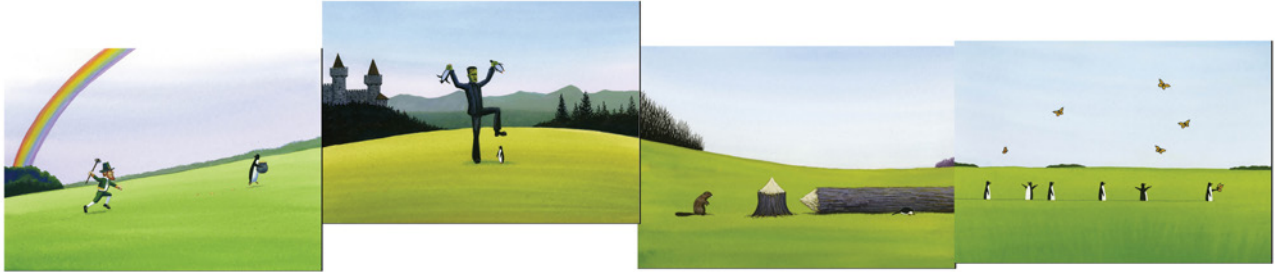
Similar to the last selection of events, the second result in the reading for this multiverse is where the penguins participate in events with scorching weather where various actors have every opportunity to challenge their survival. In this result, we also present an escalation of opposing foes, suggesting that in any event, the survival rate of the penguins is continuously threatened (Figure 9).

Conclusion

This research contributes to the existing knowledge of narrative and architecture, particularly in the way it proposes nonlinearity to unpack the understanding of sequences as a chronological progression of stories. The idea of nonlinearity follows Tschumi's (1994) proposition as the antithesis of linearity or progression of a narrative by Psarra (2009) and Coates (2012). The nonlinearity of a narrative is achieved by searching for its intertextuality or different ways of reading the narrative itself. Looking at the graphic novels with a lack of verbal devices as a potential platform for non-linear narratives, different means of manipulating the panels, as well as exploiting the stories themselves are performed in the study. Based on the creative experiment of reconstructing the panels, there are spatialisation strategies emerging from such non-linear narratives which generate multiple interpretations that are all open-ended.

This study expands the current understanding of narrative by demonstrating the full immersion towards the narrative which focuses on the inherent events and inserts one's own

intertextuality through the spatialisation mechanism. These spatialisation strategies found in the study vary; be it by being context-dependant, role-dependant, or instead, engaging in the multiverse creation altogether. The interchangeability or multiplicity of each event does not limit or hinder the comprehension of the overall narratives. This becomes essential knowledge that would guide our perspective in seeing a non-linear narrative as a potential form of narrative brimming with spatial possibilities.

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