

# Mario Rigoni Stern's "Il bosco degli urogalli" as a narrative atlas: reading the short stories collection with a cartographic imagination

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## 1. Introduction

Based on the assumption that a literary text is not an inert container of spatial information, but rather an active force that constructs spatiality and «writ[es] its own geography» (Brosseau, 1995, p. 89), this article suggests the importance of the literary text as a pivotal, active voice in geographical discourse. Engaging Mario Rigoni Stern's collection of short stories *Il bosco degli urogalli* (1962), I explore the potentialities (in terms of geographical theory) provided by allowing the cartographic imagination to inform the reading and analysis of the literary text.

As suggested by geographer Davide Papotti, literature and maps have manifold connections that can be productively explored (2012); in this article, I will investigate the heuristic potential of comparing a cartographic genre – the atlas – with a literary genre, the collection of short stories. I will read and analyse the collection of short stories as a narrative atlas able to generate geographical awareness. Here, cartography informs a theoretical (and partly metaphorical) reflection on what Emira Gherib, citing Eric Dardel's geographical theory, calls the *geographicité* of Mario Rigoni Stern (Gherib, 2010); moreover, maps participate in this reflection as material (geo)visualisations. Space, places and spatial relationships that are made readable by the literary language become visible through «reader-generated mappings» (Cooper and Priestnall, 2012, p. 250), mappings performed by the reader.

After briefly reviewing recent commentaries on geographies of short fiction, a first theorisation of the cartographic approach to the genre of the collection is advanced. Therefore, the first part of this article defines the theoretical framework, focusing on the implications of the short-story genre as being inherently spatial.

The second part of the article focuses more specifically on Mario Rigoni Stern's *Il bosco degli urogalli* [*The grouses forest*<sup>1</sup>]. As the writer's first collection

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<sup>1</sup> The English translations of the titles and of the quotes are mine.

of short stories<sup>2</sup>, this book introduces the reader to his narrative style and themes. Here, *Il bosco degli urogalli* is considered as a narrative atlas that is able to guide the reader through the main spatial themes of the writer's works, and also to encourage thinking about the real geographies of the writer's homeland, the Asiago Plateau (in the Veneto region, in the north-east of Italy), to which the collection is mainly devoted. In exploring the collection with a spatial and cartographic focus, three themes emerge: the relational transcalarities and topographies that make the collection a potential atlas of the open geographies of the Plateau; the conceptualisation of nature produced by the interrelation between the short stories; and the narrative materialisation of the space-time connection that converts the collection into a temporal atlas.

## 2. Framing the atlas-collection metaphor

2.1. *Narrative forms and literary geography* – Scholars who have historically engaged literary geography have focused mainly on one specific narrative genre: the novel. Reviewing the field, Douglas Pocock argued that «novels have been overwhelmingly the subject of scrutiny [...] because their narrative form and study of character use specific settings» (Pocock, 1988, p. 89). Marc Brosseau, theorising a geographic approach based on an increased attention to literary language, conceived «the novel as a geographer» (1995, p. 89), taking Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* as textual workshop. The novel and its discursive forms (rhetoric, as well as composition) are at the core of Brosseau's reflection on the role of literature in making urban geographies readable. The novel is considered the genre that enacts «the text-place metaphor textually» (Brosseau, 1995, p. 94). Highlighting the special relationship between the most important novelists on the first half of the twentieth century and the modern cities they wrote about, Brosseau cites the novel as an inherently spatial genre. Sheila Hones, a literary scholar and another key figure in the field, titled an essay «Literary geography: The novel as a spatial event» (2011), basing her literary geographical approach on the assumption that «the lone reader absorbed in a novel is engaging with space as the dimension of difference and distance» (*ibid.*, p. 247). Moreover, a number of geographers and literary scholars have focused, and still focus, on the novel as a productive forum in which peculiar composition forms and narrative styles intertwine to create geographies (see for example Daniels and Rycroft, 1993; Moretti, 1998; Crang, 2008; Tally, 2009; Saunders, 2013; Hones, 2014; Rossetto, 2014; Tomasi, 2014; Varotto, 2014).

In addition to focusing on the novel, contemporary research has engaged a wide variety of literary forms, such as children's literature, crime fiction, science fiction, comic books and poetry (Brosseau, 2008); however, very few contributions have examined the geographies of short story. In 2008, Marc Brosseau broke this “methodological silence” by focusing on the spatiality of Bukowski's short fiction. In his research, the geographer stressed the need to

<sup>2</sup> And his second book: the first one was the novel *Il sergente nella neve* [*The sergeant in the snow*] (1953), considered the writer's masterpiece.

conceive a literary genre as a peculiar interrelation of elements able to generate geographies. Following Brosseau's contribution, Hones wrote an article on setting and narrative style in short fiction (2011). Addressing the question of whether the short story should be conceived as a sort of "ageographical" literary genre, both authors came to the conclusion that the short story has much to offer from a geographical standpoint.

Using the authors' remarks on the short story's ability to produce spatial imaginings, and to summon peculiar geographies, as a starting point, my aim is to take the reflection further, and focus on the genre of the collection of short stories. Many authors writing short stories assemble them into collections; in the collection, the short story loses its independence and becomes part of a cohesive body. In this article, I will focus on the collection authored by a single writer, in an attempt to understand how the dialogical interrelation of short stories can provide hints to literary geographers.

A collection is more than the sum of the individual short stories that comprise it. From a spatial perspective, the geography of each story must be considered as one of the voices of the spatial discourse that is produced by the whole collection; as we will see with the analysis of Mario Rigoni Stern's work, the geography of the collection is much more than the sum of the single geographies of the short stories. Focusing on the peculiarities of literary language, in terms of composition and rhetoric, the ongoing interrelation of the single stories provides hints about the relational nature of the narrated places and spaces. Furthermore, drawing from Hones' analysis of the role of the reader in discovering (and creating) the geographies of the texts – the «text happens» thanks to the reader (Hones, 2008, p. 1301) – a collection of short stories provides the reader with an important agency. Each reader can follow the structure of the collection, or freely read the short stories out of their proposed order. This allows the reader to trace a personal map across the narratives, drawing unpredictable connections. Therefore, readers make the collection happen in different ways, converting the short stories into tiles of a mobile mosaic. The montage can be continually negotiated; the collection is not merely a material surface that can be freely read, but the theatre of the production of meanings (Brosseau, 1995). In this article, I will explore how a collection of short stories can be the site for the production of spatial meaning and knowledge.

2.2. *Comparing the atlas to the collection of short stories* – Having established the reasons why the collection of short stories can enter the literary geographical discourse, we must now insert the genre into a mapping context.

As stated previously, the relationships between maps and literature can provide important hints as to the literary geographer's stance. First of all, maps stimulate writers' imaginations (Muehrcke and Muehrcke, 1974). Thus, the cartographic imagination not only participates in the creation of literary works, but also stimulates and informs the readers' analysis and interpretation of them. Literary texts are sources of cartographies, «immense archives of living maps and emergent mapping practices» (Rossetto, 2014, p. 524); as such, they give voice to practices often mute (*ibidem*). Through the logic of

cartography, it is possible to interpret the literary text by investigating the implicit maps that structure narrative spatiality (Guglielmi and Iacoli, 2012): place-names, coordinates, addresses, numbers and a strong presence of places – fictive or recognisable – call the reader to build personal mental maps while reading. These cartographic imaginings help these narratives connect with the world outside them.

The cartographic imagination participates in this article in two different ways. From a metaphorical perspective, the genre of the atlas (and the cartographic imagination deriving from it) informs the reading of Rigoni Stern's collection: concepts such as scale, topography, space and time visualisation inform the literary geographical reflection. Then, from a graphic perspective, cartography supports the reasoning: each spatial argument is combined with a geovisualisation.

The concept of atlas has long been referenced when speaking about the connection between literature and space. Moretti entitled his seminal work on literary mapping *Atlas of the European Novel. 1800-1900* (1998); this book draws materially from the concept of atlas, geo-visually engaging the space of the nineteenth-century European novel. Other authors have explored similar themes: Giulio Iacoli's *Atlante delle derive [Atlas of drifts]* (2002) engaged the theoretical and metaphorical potential of the atlas. Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà wrote a three-volumes *Atlante della letteratura italiana [Atlas of Italian literature]* (2011), where space was used as the key category to understand the history of Italian literature. Moreover, many literary mapping projects spreading on the web present a spatial discourse on literature involving the concept of atlas (Luchetta, 2017). The atlas is nowadays engaged materially and metaphorically as an interpretative tool, encouraging reflections on the connection between narratives and spaces.

Nevertheless, the contemporary concept of atlas has lost its original (modern) aim of creating a coherent and complete discourse on a specific space. As geographer Franco Farinelli suggests (1992), Atlas<sup>3</sup> is not carrying the world anymore, he is just trying to hold it, and to prevent it from becoming completely invisible to us. In the contemporary world, Atlas acknowledges the increasing “unmappability” of the world; geographers have to abandon the idea of homogeneous discourse in favour of a complex and polyphonic dialogue that is open to other disciplines. This is the reason for the connection between atlases and literature: literary narrations offer a new potential to make the world *readable* and – at least – visible.

Therefore, *Il bosco degli urogalli* is called upon to participate as one of the voices of a discourse on contemporary conceptions of spaces and places. By involving the atlas-collection metaphor (without naturalising it<sup>4</sup>), we can say that these short stories present spatial relationships, and that each map, each

<sup>3</sup> The Italian geographer speaks about the Greek mythological titan who had to carry the world on his back; the figure was depicted for the first time on Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* frontispiece (1570). This was considered the first atlas, although the term “atlas” was used for the first time by Gerardus Mercator (Farinelli, 1992; Siemer and Asche, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> In this way, it «stays nervous, unnatural, and resists early sedimentation» (Brousseau, 1995, p. 94).

story, is part of a complex *narrative* discourse. The short stories reveal the world in a way that we could not see without their intervention, exactly like the maps of an atlas (Wood, 1987). The short stories of *Il bosco degli urogalli* share a narrative style, as maps of an atlas usually share a uniform structure and design (Siemer and Asche, 2009). Like the maps of an atlas, these short stories are arranged in an order that creates a specific mediation, a narration. In reading both the collection of stories and the atlas, the reader can disrupt this order to freely interpret the inter-relatedness of stories or maps, creating meanings.

### 3. *Il bosco degli urogalli: A narrative atlas*

3.1. *Mario Rigoni Stern's spatial writing* – Mario Rigoni Stern tells stories in an inherently spatial way. Space is the key category that informs and affects all of his works, from his narrative expression of his WWII experience to his books dedicated to his homeland. In all of his writing, space is the protagonist, together with the characters that live in and experience it: this is what Marc Brosseau would call «the geography in the text» (1995, p. 95). Spatiality also affects narrative expression, generating the geography of the text (Brosseau, 1995). Starting with the narration of the retreat of the Italian soldiers in Russia during WWII (*Il sergente nella neve* [*The sergeant in the snow*], 1953), Rigoni Stern renders the spatial experience as a crucial heuristic category; on the page, each human's involvement with the space contributes to a collective experience that is able to evoke reflections on ethics, belonging, citizenship, temporality and other (spatial) issues.

*Il bosco degli urogalli* is a rather short collection, consisting of eleven short stories of different lengths. The stories are structured around three themes: war, hunting and emigration. Engaging the atlas-collection metaphor, *Il bosco degli urogalli* can be considered as the thematic atlas of Rigoni Stern's key narrative focal points. Prefiguring the trajectories of the author's future work, this text discloses Rigoni Stern's commitment to space as a crucial heuristic category that generates narrations and helps understanding the human condition. The collection can also be considered a crucial guide for grasping the complexity of the Asiago Plateau and for informing theoretical ruminations (Rossetto, 2015) on the concepts of space and place.

In the next sections of the article, I will focus on three key spatial issues that emerge from Rigoni Stern's collection. Through the exploration of these issues, I engage the atlas-collection metaphor, exploring the ways in which the short stories relate to each other and build a collective geography.

3.2. *Coming and going: The transcalar identity of the Asiago Plateau* – The spatial practices that most affect the short stories in *Il bosco degli urogalli* are leaving from and returning to the Plateau. Most of the short stories are characterised by one of these two spatial (and existential) movements, which produce different narrative scales. Like the maps of an atlas, the stories relate to each other, producing a dialogical transcalarity that – for example – goes from the local to the global scale of emigration. The reader is called upon to connect the stories

and the ongoing movement to and from the Plateau: this movement becomes the spatial core of the collection.

A soldier coming back home (to the Plateau) from a concentration camp in Silesia is the protagonist of the first short story, *Di là c'è la Carnia* [*Carnia is over there*]. The return is narrated in the third person. Starting from the local scale of a concentration camp, the prisoner makes his way home by walking across Europe. The return from the war constantly informs the other texts of the collection; this kind of return typically introduces the short story (as in *Una lettera dall'Australia* [*A letter from Australia*] and in *Alba e Franco* [*Alba and Franco*]), which then develops around other spatial practices (and at other scales), such as emigration or hunting. Another thematic return in the short story collection concerns emigrants' coming back home. However, there is no coming back without having left: other stories tell us about people leaving the Plateau, toward a better future (*Vecchia America* [*Old America*], *Una lettera dall'Australia*) or toward the war (*Incontro in Polonia* [*Encounter in Poland*]). Almost all of the short stories engage at least one of the two sides of the come-and-go motif.

The ongoing interrelation of the returning to and the going from the Plateau asks the reader to re-negotiate the in/out binary. The inside of the Plateau is continually renegotiated by the outside, as experienced by the people who come and go. On the other hand, the outside is continually defined by the people's belonging to the inside. The Asiago Plateau is narratively constructed around the ongoing relationship between the experiences lived inside and outside of it. In and out are permeable spatial categories, and the reader is called to reflect on their dialogue. The narrative identity of the Plateau takes the reader beyond the opposition between a sense of place focused on rootedness, attachment and singularity and a progressive sense of place centred on flows, connections and networks (Cresswell, 2014): the two sense of place vocations coexist through the transclarity of the narrations. In the collection, the island of the Plateau<sup>5</sup> becomes a sea (Isnenghi, 2009): this metaphorical transformation is embedded into the interrelation of the short stories. Reading the collection and relating it to the Plateau that exists outside the literary page, the reader is called to resume the concepts of coming and going as categories that structure its open identity. Understanding the collection as a narrative atlas calls us to interpret the nature of the *real* Plateau as both rooted and movable, contingent and informed by the past, localised and delocalised. *Il bosco degli urogalli* is not the sum of a single come-and-go, but the continuous interrelation of the two practices centred on Rigoni Stern's homeland. Through this interrelation, the collection (as a geographer) is able to guide the readers' gaze on the world outside the text. In engaging the cartographic imagination, we must also pay attention to the role of place-names, and absence thereof, in the collection. Place-names have a structural function in Mario Rigoni Stern's fiction (Varotto and Luchetta, 2014). In his novels, for example, the presence of place-names linked to the Plateau gives meaningful rhythm to the page. In *Il bosco degli urogalli*, like maps of an atlas, topographical fullness and emptiness

<sup>5</sup> From a geomorphological point of view, the Plateau is delimited by majestic bastions and deep valleys that separate it from the subjacent plain.

build a geographical narrative discourse. From a toponymical point of view, the Plateau is narratively almost empty. When it is narrated (take for example the hunting stories), it is not named. The Plateau is explained as a place where the inhabitants live their lives – to which people return and from which people leave – but it stands on the page as a kind of universal place where an absence of name leaves room for topographical vagueness.

In contrast to this vagueness comes the rich presence of place-names when the narration is devoted to the "outside": France, Switzerland, Poland and all the places linked to emigration and war are always named as accurately as possible. Beyond a mere mimesis of reality, the treatment of place-names has a precise role in providing the narration with further meanings concerning the inside/outside binary. Indeed, the toponymical emptiness of the Plateau amplifies the rare presence of place-names linked to it; *Incontro in Polonia* encourages an important reflection on this issue. This is one of the writer's most famous short stories, in which his trip to Russia to the WWII front is told in the first person. While stuck in a Polish train station, the narrator hears a man on the platform, saying: «Io Italia. Io guerra Italia. Io Asiago»<sup>6</sup> (*ibid.*, p. 130). Hearing the name of his hometown, the narrator gets off the train:

«Paesano,» gli gridai, «tu Italia? Tu Asiago?»  
«Sì,» disse, «io guerra Italia; io Asiago»<sup>7</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 130).

This is the only time that the name "Asiago" is mentioned in the collection. Here, we experience a sort of meaningful overturning: the place-name displaces the setting of the narration, blurring spatial (and political) otherness and moving the Plateau to Poland (fig. 1).

The dialogue between the two characters offers Rigoni Stern the chance to develop a transcalar narrative reflection on borders, war and the human condition. In this case, the spatial category (provided through the place-name) generates an ethos that will never leave the author's writings; indeed, the short story ends with one of Rigoni Stern's most famous quotes:

«Chi ritornerà di quanti siamo su questo treno? Quanti compaesani uccideremo? E perché?»  
Giacché al mondo siamo tutti paesani<sup>8</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 133).

This narrative ethos is inherently spatial: the belonging to the same spatial community (the same village) becomes an allegory of the need to politically reconsider human otherness; through the place-name linked to his homeland, Rigoni Stern realises the tragedy of the war, and the harmful role of political borders in establishing the allied/enemy categories.

<sup>6</sup> The character cannot speak Italian well: "I Italy. I war Italy. I Asiago".

<sup>7</sup> «Fellow countryman» I shouted at him, «you Italy? You Asiago?» «Yes,» he told me, «I war Italy; I Asiago.».

<sup>8</sup> «How many of us will return home? How many fellow countrymen will we kill? And why? Since we are all fellow countrymen in the world».





Fig. 1 – *Incontro in Polonia*. This transcalar geo-visualisation makes the dialogue between Poland and Rigoni Stern's homeland visible. The Asiago Plateau, drawn in watercolor, shapes the figure and overlaps a 1939 political map representing wartime. Like an island in a white ocean, the Plateau calls the reader to think about the narrative dialogue between two different scales, remembering Rigoni Stern's ethos of human spatial fellowship. Furthermore, watercolors invite the reader to reflect on the role of borders, suggesting going beyond the neat and black "political" lines of the underlying map. The toponym Asiago is located on the place where the Polish man mentions it.

3.3. *The human-nature divide: A narrative atlas to go beyond the binary* – The second crucial spatial element that emerges from the collection is the narrative treatment of nature. The concept of nature has long been explored by Rigoni Stern's narrative works; it is one of his most important themes, and a vector of his literary construction. *Il bosco degli urogalli* is the place where the author begins to develop his personal nature writing: for this reason, the collection can be read as a thematic atlas that guides readers into his world. The collection builds its own concept of nature: the ongoing dialogue between the short stories frames a spatial discourse that invites the interpreter to explore and challenge the human-nature divide.

Considering the absence of any human element in the title of the collection, it may be easy for the reader to assume a relatively straightforward understanding of the boundaries around "human" and "nature" (Nightingale, 2014). The collection seems to be devoted to the narration of what is conceived as "nature". Nevertheless, the short story that opens the collection is *Di là c'è la Carnia*, which narrates a concentration camp prisoner walking back home; this first story disrupts the reader's expectations, putting immediately into play the ongoing dialogue between the human and nature. The title of the collection tells the readers that nature will be the protagonist of the collection, but the first short story tells them they will have to question the presence of the human



category in relation to nature (and vice-versa). The forest of the title is one of the most important elements of the collection; it does not participate in the narration as an isolated element, but as a crucial element of the definition of the human. Therefore, it conveys the need to reflect on the co-production of the human and the natural (in both practical and conceptual terms).

The forest is a key guiding element for all of the short stories. It is the space where the characters hunt, but above all, it is the space (never tagged with a toponym) where characters recover their human nature. Indeed, one important topic in Rigoni Stern's works is the alienation of the soldiers returning home from the concentration camps or the war. The survivors go to the forest in order to recover from their traumatic experiences. From *Di là c'è la Carnia*:

Partiva al mattino e ritornava alla sera, girava tutto il giorno per i boschi come se avesse da cercare qualcosa, così per tanti giorni<sup>9</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

In *Lettera dall'Australia*, narrating the experience of a character coming home from Prussia and wandering around in the forest alone, the narrator explains his own experience:

Anch'io, in quel tempo, quasi tutti i giorni andavo per i boschi come un orso ferito, masticando ricordi ed esperienze per cercar di vederci chiaro in questo mondo e ritrovarmi<sup>10</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 26).

Characters walk in the forest, trying to rebuild a lost sense of humanity; they recover from their "illness" at the intersection of the wilderness and a life characterized by human activities (in particular through the practice of working the wood). In *Alba e Franco* we find the recovery of the characters through their working as woodsmen:

Eravamo dopo la liberazione e i tre fratelli, Piero, Giacomo e Bruno, consegnati i mitra e le bombe all'autorità, ripresero la scure. Ritornarono al bosco, questa volta, per lavorare da uomini liberi<sup>11</sup> (*Ibid.*, p. 101).

In the forest, humanity meets the ethos of free work, and the characters recover their role in society as men free to choose their own lives: this encounter moves the narrative toward a focus on the concept of nature. The natural is built as a complex concept, the product of the interrelation between environmental elements (the forest), and human practices (and the meanings that emerge from these practices). Dissolving human alienation, nature embraces the human and becomes an integral part of humanity. Beyond acting as a mere

<sup>9</sup> «He left in the morning and returned in the evening, he wandered around in the forest all day long as he had to search for something, for many days».

<sup>10</sup> «At that time, almost every day, I went into the forest all days like a wounded bear, chewing memories and experiences in order to try to see it more clearly and find myself».

<sup>11</sup> «It was after the Liberation, and the brothers Piero, Giacomo and Bruno, after delivering the assault rifle and the bombs to the authority, picked up the axe. They came back to the forest, this time, to work as free men».

background, and being considered separate from the human, nature calls for a renegotiation of its relational essence. In accordance with the introductory definition of the contemporary role of the atlas, the collection becomes an atlas-voice of the geographical dialogue on the human/nature divide. By understanding the ongoing connection between the short stories that make up the collection, we are called to restructure and mobilise a concept of nature that is nowadays at the core of a complex interdisciplinary debate (Castree, 2005). Each short story seizes nature (in particular the forest), and narratively intertwines it with human practices (fig. 2); as stars in a conceptual constellation, the stories shape the human/nature binary and the need to challenge it.

Another consistent concept of nature that emerges in the collection is the hunting stories. Hunting can be considered as a hierarchical practice in which the human kind rules over the animals and decides their life or death. This vertical, unbalanced relationship seems to convey a concept of nature built on the separation of the spheres. Once again, *Il bosco degli urogalli* calls us to renegotiate a concept that we may take for granted and forces us to question a contested practice. This issue could be the basis for a wider ecocritical reflection (see Iovino, 2006), but here I will focus only upon the features that invite us to question the narrative construction of nature.

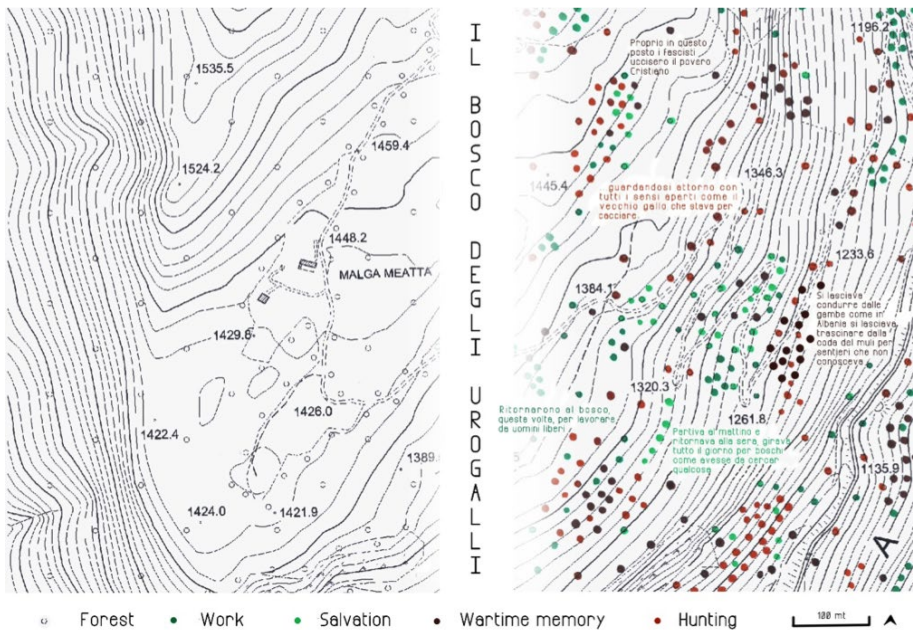


Fig. 2 – «A meaningful forest». The cartographic base on the left, a technical regional map of Veneto, is re-negotiated on the right by the presence of human meanings emerging from *Il bosco degli urogalli*. On the left, the forest is represented by little black circles that on the right are painted with different colours. Each colour represents a practice produced by the relationship between the human and nature. In addition to be filled with colours, the little circles irregularly grow on the right in order to give voice to a forest where meanings spread out and interrelate (circles are very permeable symbols that allow to represent coexistence of meanings). Finally, narrative words intertwine with symbols, enhancing the complex human-nature dialogue.

Seven short stories of the eleven involve hunting experiences. As a practice that structures the collection, hunting is analysed and questioned by the author several times. Disclosing its contradictions focusing on the hunting performed by ex-soldiers<sup>12</sup>, the author explores the intersections of nature and the human within it. The most interesting narrative feature used for this purpose is the point of view. The scenes are all narrated with an internal focalization: the reader understands the hunter's thoughts and perceptions. The hunter feels like the animal, and sometimes it is unclear who is hunting whom. Rejecting vertical hierarchies, the narrative builds horizontal movements and practices, and renegotiates the human-nature nexus. In *Lettera dall'Australia*, this trend involves the engagement of the grouse's point of view; the use of perspective guides the reader through the renegotiation of the relationship between the human and the natural.

In this renegotiation of the human-nature divide, the atlas-collection metaphor is called into question. In this case, the relationship between the short stories is at the core of the consideration: the concept of nature emerges from the interrelation of the short stories, which can be considered the maps (as their relationship informs the reader's gaze) in an "atlas of nature".

3.4. *Spatialising time: The collection as a temporal atlas* – The last crucial geographical issue emerging from the collection is the relationship between space and time. In accordance with Bakhtin's concept of artistic chronotope (1981), literary words bring to the pages the intimate relationship between space and time. The collection can thus also be considered as a temporal atlas: the interrelating short stories present different ways through which the spatial category engages and builds the temporal one. Indeed, in Rigoni Stern's chronotope, the key category is not Bakhtin's concept of time, but the concept of space. Space generates time, marks its passing on the page and makes it readable.

In analysing the chronotope, it is worth beginning with a consideration of form. Time is condensed in Rigoni Stern's writing through the spatial category; in particular, the spatial practices informing the narrations express also the passing of time. Therefore, there is a relation between the "come and go" transcalar motif analysed above and the narration of time. Take, for example, the first short story of the collection, *Di là c'è la Carnia*, in which the soldier's walking home condenses the passage of time. Verbs and phrases like *camminava*, *continuò a camminare*, *passò*, *camminava*, *camminava sempre*, *camminava solamente* and *camminando* (*Ibid.*, pp. 16-18)<sup>13</sup> assemble a fragmented narration of walking home, and condense the passing of time on the page. The coming and going to and from the Plateau spatially structure the time of the story; the use of space to construct time invites us to reflect upon the intimate relationship between spatial practices and the construction of human time. The transcalar tension of the collection corresponds with the narrative materiali-

<sup>12</sup> The author questions the contradictions embedded in the soldiers' willingness to use the rifle after having used it during the tragic experience of the war.

<sup>13</sup> «He walked», «He continued to walk», «He passed through», «He walked, always walked», «He only walked», «walking».

sation of time, and again, like the maps of an atlas, the short stories make the space-time connection readable.

In *Dentro il bosco* [*Into the forest*], another connection between space and time emerges. The story's title sets the expectation of following Rigoni Stern's pattern of attention to the natural. Instead, this story tells of the killing of a young man by a fascist during WWII. The narration unfolds through different levels: the first one frames the core episode. In this first level, the narrator and other characters are resting in the forest, and one of the characters, stimulated by the vision of the place, begins to tell the story of a man who was killed there. The place (which is not named) engenders the narration, making the times overlap and thus coexist. Place and time intertwine to communicate the open construction of place. For the characters, as for the readers, in space we can read time (see also Schlögel, 2016).

In *A caccia con l'Australiaiano* [*Hunting with the Australian*], another spatio-temporal intersection is uncovered. This is one of the two short stories in the collection in which the Plateau is identified by place-names. The story illustrates a hunting episode. Naming the places that have been covered by the hunters, the narrator resorts to the explanation of the origin of two of the mentioned place-names. Engaging a graphic strategy, the author carves out a space on the page using round brackets. The reader is led to understand not only the origins of the place-names as explained by the author, but also their temporal nature. Times overlap on the page; the use of brackets creates a sort of simultaneity where narrative time and past time coexist (fig. 3).

The last space-time intersection embodies another of Rigoni Stern's interesting stylistic choices: the materialisation of narrative time through referring to a place. This passage demonstrates this component of the author's style:

Senza che ce ne accorgessimo, il sole era sceso dietro il Verena. Restava forse ancora mezz'ora di luce[...]<sup>14</sup> (*Chiusura di caccia* [*Hunting closure*], p. 160).

The time in this selection is condensed onto the page by using the position of the sun on a mountain of the Plateau. In addition to providing the short story with a spatio-temporal coordinate, the author highlights the ability of reference points to orient the reader's gaze toward a specific space and time. This chronotope, based on human perspective, invites us to consider the inherent relatedness of space and time in the human construction of meaning. Metaphorically engaging the concept of atlas, the inter-relatedness of the short stories generates a chronotope able to guide the readers in understanding space-time connections. Like the single frame maps of an atlas, time is presented through single spatial representations that relate to each other generating a cohesive discourse able to guide the readers' gaze toward the space-time connections that exist outside the pages.

<sup>14</sup> «Without us noticing it, the sun had fallen behind Verena. Maybe half an hour of light remained [...]».

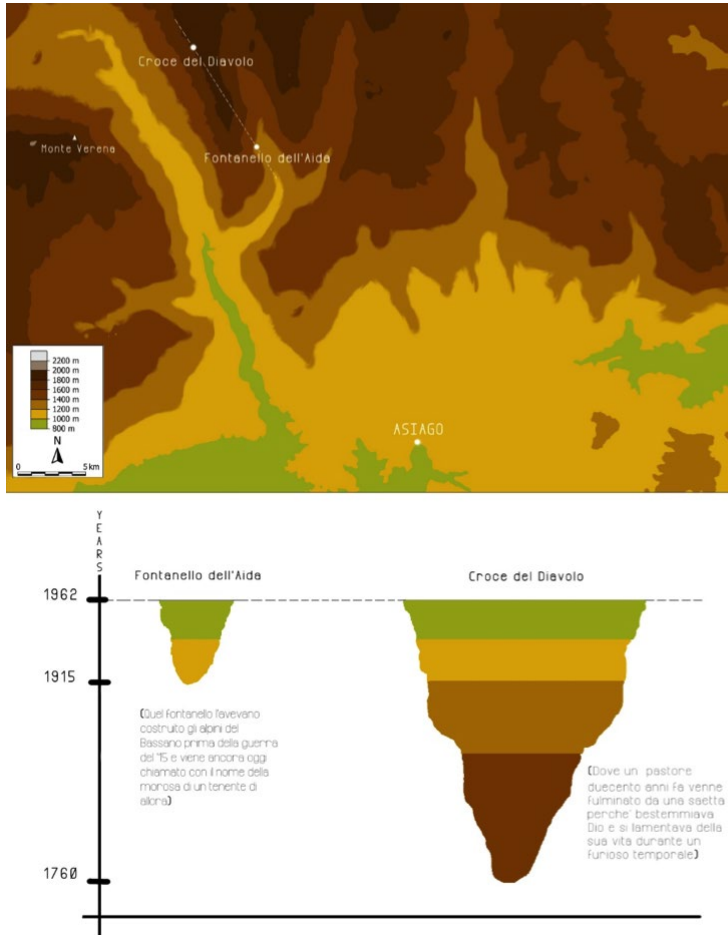


Fig. 3 – «Space-time interrelations: temporal depth». This geo-visualisation represents one of the space-time connections that are made visible by the collection. The map at the top is an elevation map of the Plateau, where four of the place-names mentioned in the collection are located. Two of them are connected by a line. At the bottom, in spite of a traditional elevation profile, there is a temporal profile; it marks the temporal depth of the two place-names of which Rigoni Stern narrates the origins. The profile graphically materialises the two places as the products of the interrelation of different times. In the “temporal profile”, narrative words (in round brackets, as in the short story) interact with the graphic profile.

#### 4. Conclusions

Unfolding from the ongoing and moveable relationships between the short stories of the collection, Rigoni Stern's narrative atlas has much to offer a geographic consideration. I have aimed to establish the possibility of reading the collection as an atlas, calling upon the cartographic imagination to enhance the analysis. Furthermore, I proposed three narrative geo-visualisations aimed at generating a possible visual atlas of the collection, calling the author's crucial spatial issues to become visible.

The reason for engaging Rigoni Stern's *Il bosco degli urogalli* with a carto-

graphic perspective is the need to find voices that enhance the geographic dialogue. This atlas-collection, thanks to its relational nature, is able to contribute to a polyphonic spatial discourse – which, more than fifty years later, is able to provide hints to a critical and contemporary analysis of space and place. The transcalar “come-and-go” motif of the collection encourages the reader to rethink the concept of place, and specifically the Plateau: an open place where meanings are under construction. The narrative engagement of the concept of nature as relational invites us to continue re-negotiating it; finally, the literary space-time constructions create a temporal atlas that helps us to grasp the multi-dimensional complexity of the geographies of the world. *Il bosco degli urogalli* can be considered as a multi-layered atlas, a textual theatre where geographical meanings unfold.

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*“Il bosco degli urogalli” di Mario Rigoni Stern come un atlante narrativo: leggere la raccolta di racconti attraverso l’immaginazione cartografica*

Partendo dal riconoscimento dell’importanza dei testi letterari quali voci attive del discorso geografico, lo scopo di questo contributo è quello di esplorare le potenzialità interpretative della comparazione fra un genere cartografico – l’atlante – e un genere letterario, la raccolta di racconti. *Il bosco degli urogalli* (1962), raccolta dello scrittore Mario Rigoni Stern, è qui analizzata come un atlante narrativo capace di costruire le proprie geografie (Brosseau, 1995), e di orientare lo sguardo del lettore nelle geografie del mondo. L’analisi si concentra in particolare su tre temi spaziali che emergono dalla raccolta: la transcalarità e le topografie che fanno della raccolta dello scrittore vicentino un atlante delle geografie aperte dell’Altopiano di Asiago; il peculiare concetto di natura che emerge dalla relazione fra i racconti; la materializzazione narrativa dei rapporti fra spazio e tempo che trasformano la raccolta in un atlante temporale. La metafora dell’atlante è inoltre accompagnata da alcune geo-visualizzazioni narrative atte a proporre un possibile atlante materiale de *Il bosco degli urogalli*.

*La Chasse aux coqs de bruyère de Mario Rigoni Stern comme un atlas narratif: le texte littéraire et l’imagination cartographique*

A partir de la reconnaissance de l’importance des textes littéraires comme voix actives dans le discours géographique, l’objectif de cette contribution est d’explorer le potentiel d’interprétation de la comparaison entre un genre cartographique – l’atlas – et un genre littéraire, la collection d’histoire courte. *La Chasse aux coqs de bruyère*, collection de l’écrivain Mario Rigoni Stern, est analysée ici comme un atlas narratif capable de construire sa propre géographie (Brosseau, 1995), et capable de guider l’œil du lecteur dans la géographie du monde. L’analyse porte notamment sur trois thèmes spatiaux qui se dégagent de la collection: les différentes échelles et topographies qui font la collection de l’écrivain a un atlas de la géographie «ouvert» de le Plateau de Asiago; le particulière concept de la nature qui se dégage de la relation entre les histoires; la matérialisation narrative de la relation entre l’espace et le temps qui transforme la collection en un atlas de la tempête. La métaphore de l’atlas est aussi accompagnée par des cartes narratives visant à proposer un atlas possible de *La Chasse aux coqs de bruyère*.