

Wandering in the Text: Spatial Approaches to Teaching *Indiana*

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Our experience of space is a social construction. Whether we are relaxing at home, riding in a train, walking on the street, or hiking through a forest, our perception of what surrounds us cannot be separated from the ways in which we project meaning onto our environment, and our environment is refashioned to conform to our desires. Cities, both planned and unplanned, hold countless layers of meaning. They adapt to their natural geography according to political and aesthetic values. Neighborhoods develop according to the dynamics of collective and economic forces. Monuments preserve an image of the past and serve as landmarks orienting our mental and symbolic map of a city. Storefronts, billboards, traffic signs, and passersby all compete for our attention: "La cité est un discours, et ce discours est véritablement un langage" "The city is a discourse, and this discourse is truly a language" (Barthes, "Sémiologie" 1280; my trans.).

While real spaces are already representations, space in a novel is by definition always textual, which is to say that fictional space is conveyed by written language and participates in the novel's network of meaning. A reading of George Sand's *Indiana* that is attentive to questions of the representation of space, at the levels both of the text and of the historical and geographic context, will inevitably produce insights about the function of space in the French imagination of the 1830s. Indiana Delmare's adventures in traversing real places (Paris, Bordeaux, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and others) inform the reader about the particular historical moment following the disappointing revolution of July 1830 and in particular the way nineteenth-century women were policed in their movements. But these real places also carry symbolic meaning in the novel, as they suggest the various psychological states of the main character and especially the ideological lens of the male narrator.

The two main female characters in *Indiana*, Indiana and her foster sister and servant, Noun, are defined not only by their presumed races and classes, but also by geography—they are "créoles," women of European or mixed origin born in the colonies. Indiana's name calls attention to her geographic otherness. She remains an exotic beauty in France, but at the same time her European ancestry sets her apart in Île Bourbon (today's Réunion) from the majority of the island's inhabitants. She is always an outsider, always out of place, whether in high society in Paris or in the wilderness of Île Bourbon. The novel's narrator and male characters emphasize repeatedly the value society places on stability and order. Everything and everyone has a category and a place; to cross boundaries or to change places risks upsetting the moral foundation of society. The narrator succinctly characterizes the philosophy of Indiana's abusive husband, Delmare: "Chacun chez soi" 'everyone for himself' (132 [95]; 87) or perhaps

"everyone is master in his own home." But since Indiana has no home, no place where she belongs, the spatial and gender politics of her time are so stifling as to endanger her very being. Her only options seem to be suicide by drowning (following Noun) or suicide by antisocial rebellion (following her eventual companion, Ralph).

In a society where everyone must know their proper place, mobility (both in the metaphorical sense of social mobility and the literal sense of moving through space) amounts to a criminal act. Within the first few pages, Indiana's melancholic condition is explicitly linked to the immobility imposed on her and everyone else at her husband's terminally boring country estate:

On eût dit, à voir l'immobilité des deux personnages [Indiana and her cousin Sir Ralph] en relief devant le foyer, qu'ils craignaient de déranger l'immobilité de la scène; fixes et pétrifiés comme les héros d'un conte de fées, on eût dit que la moindre parole, le plus léger mouvement allait faire écrouler sur eux les murs d'une cité fantastique; et le maître [Delmare] au front rembruni, qui d'un pas égal coupait seul l'ombre et le silence, ressemblait assez à un sourcier qui les eût tenus sous le charme. (53 [22])

On seeing the two motionless figures [Indiana and her cousin Sir Ralph] sitting prominently in front of the fireplace, you would have thought that they were afraid to disturb the stillness of the scene. They seemed fixed and turned into stone like the heroes of a fairy-tale, and you would have thought that the least word, the slightest movement, was going to make the walls of an imaginary city collapse upon them, while the gloomy master of the house [Delmare], whose regular step was the only break in the dark silence, was rather like a magician who had cast a spell over them. (18)

Delmare has complete freedom of movement as master of the house; in the opening pages he paces around the salon in a desperate attempt to stave off boredom and only succeeds in finding a joyful diversion when an intruder is spotted trespassing on his domain. As the above passage suggests, this immobility hides a structural instability; any movement of our two "heroes" will destroy the illusion, and Delmare's authority will crumble. But the narrator's fairy tale also alerts the reader that when the walls of Delmare's fantastic city fall, they will also crush the two heroes, Indiana and Ralph. The novel's double ending satisfies the denouement foreshadowed in the fairy tale but allows for the hope of new spaces far from society's influence.

Given the immobility imposed on Indiana by her husband on one side and the suicidal inclinations of those closest to her on the other, Indiana's negotiation of the spaces around her is remarkable. Her practice of space regularly consists of remembering one place while moving through another; in a sense she experiences two places at once. As Michel de Certeau theorized, to practice space is to disrupt what he calls the "loi du propre" 'the law of the proper' of

place, which is the natural law ruling that every place, by definition occupying a single location and moment, must be unique.¹ One cannot physically occupy two places at the same time, and two objects cannot occupy the same place.

Yet Indiana repeatedly calls forth images of one place while inhabiting another. When Raymon de Ramière is led into Indiana's bedroom by Noun, he is surprised to discover tastefully eclectic furnishings, ranging from a harp, romance novels, travel books, a palm branch, and engravings of Paul and Virginie and of Île Bourbon (101 [67]; 61). Everything in her room in the sober French countryside evokes an image of her island home far away. As if to render literal Indiana's mental absence from her physical presence, Raymon lulls himself into the illusion that Noun, wearing Indiana's clothing and seducing him in Indiana's room, is in fact Indiana; Noun conjures up Indiana's body, but Indiana is elsewhere.

Indiana's disruption of the law of place, of the boundaries between places, is most evident in the various episodes when she wanders by herself. Every time Indiana breaks free of her dependence on men, she wanders in spaces unfamiliar to her in what is described by the narrator as a delusional state. After Raymon leaves her the first time, she wanders Paris alone, apparently mistaking the Seine for the stream in which Noun drowned (226–28 [175–77]; 171–73). On Île Bourbon, she walks in the wilderness and sees images of Paris in the cloud forms above the mountains (253–54 [199–200]; 194–95). Upon her return to France in the wake of the July revolution, she gets lost in Bordeaux and, without identity papers, is registered at a hospital as a Jane Doe (290–92 [232–34]; 226–28). Finally she ends up alone and destitute in a hotel room in Paris, which the narrator describes as a veritable "non-lieu" devoid of memories and meaning and in stark contrast to the Paris of her dreams (299 [238]; 234–35).² During each of these prolonged walks, the variety of strange images encountered in these new spaces provokes a profound reverie in Indiana, who believes that she is in some other place. Out of place in a rigidly immobile society, she wanders entranced by the illusion of interpenetrated places where her seemingly incompatible desires and duties might happily coexist.

Indiana's wandering is clearly an expression of her desire for greater freedom of movement, a desire to control her own destiny; as the narrator sums up, "chez elle, tout se rapportait à une certaine faculté d'illusions, à une ardente aspiration vers un point qui n'était ni le souvenir, ni l'attente, ni l'espoir, ni le regret, mais le désir dans toute son intensité dévorante" "everything [for her] was linked to a certain ability to create delusions, to an ardent aspiration towards something that was not memory, nor expectation, nor hope, nor regret, but desire in all its consuming intensity" (254 [200]; 194–95). Her spatial "illusions" are not based on memory, hope, or wish fulfillment; rather, they are the pure expression of desire. Her wandering is therefore very disturbing to the men of the novel: Delmare, Raymon, the narrator, and especially Sir Ralph. Analyzing any one of these passages closely (a useful in-class activity), the reader discovers not only Indiana's associations of disparate images and places but also the nar-

rator's subtle manipulation of the scene to characterize her wandering as dangerous and insane. Her thoughts while walking in Paris are a "rêverie stupide" 'dazed reverie,' a "méditation sans idées" 'mindless meditation,' and "un état de somnambulisme" '[a state of] sleepwalking' (226 [175]; 172). According to the narrator, her evening walks in Île Bourbon, where she sees the Louvre and Notre-Dame in the clouds over the ocean and imagines herself flying away to the city of her dreams, appear to the outsider to be only the symptoms of madness: "pour qui eût observé alors ses yeux avides, son sein haletant d'impatience et l'effrayante expression de joie répandue sur ses traits, elle eût offert tous les symptômes de la folie" 'for anyone who might have seen her eager eyes, her breast panting with impatience, and the terrifying expression of joy on her face, she would have shown all the symptoms of madness' (254 [200]; 194). Her expression of joy is "terrifying," her desire for movement "madness."

The narrator's invention of a fictional observer makes explicit one of the most understated yet disturbing aspects of the novel: the almost constant surveillance of Indiana's every movement. In fact, Sir Ralph miraculously tracks Indiana down every single time she strays off, to "save" her from her dangerous illusions. He prevents her from falling into the Seine and convinces her that she really wanted to commit suicide (229 [178]; 174). The reader learns a few pages after the description of Indiana's evening walks in Île Bourbon and her apparently delirious dreams of Paris that Sir Ralph always watched over her from a distance, spying on her from behind tree branches from the rocks below (258 [203]; 197–98). After she escapes the island, arrives secretly in Bordeaux, and then finds herself destitute and unknown in an anonymous hotel in Paris, Sir Ralph of course discovers her location; as the narrator cheekily declares, "[I] s'en présenta un [médecin] qu'on n'avait pas été cherché. . . . Je n'ai pas besoin de vous dire son nom" '[A doctor] appeared who had not been sent for. . . . I don't need to tell you his name' (301 [240]; 236). Though over the course of the narrative Ralph becomes a sympathetic Romantic hero, his love for Indiana compels him to watch over her continually. His surveillance or perhaps voyeurism does not prevent her from exploring her freedom of movement and her desire for new places, but his concern for her safety amounts to a condescending paternalism.

The novel's conclusion informs us after hundreds of pages that the narrator is not omniscient but rather a young man in search of adventure who has heard Indiana's story from the mouth of Ralph himself and from the gossip of the inhabitants of Île Bourbon. In this Russian doll of narrative voices, the innermost thoughts and dreams of Indiana turn out to be born from the imagination of Ralph and the male narrator, and these are born from Sand's imagination: thus a woman author imagines what men imagine a woman to imagine. In a final twist, the rational and misogynistic narrator repeats for himself in the wilds of Île Bourbon the same experience of delusional wandering he attributes to Indiana. While contemplating the island's volcanic rock formations, the narrator dreams that he sees architectural motifs from every civilization and, upon closer

inspection, makes himself believe for a moment that he can read hieroglyphs or cabalistic signs in the graphic-seeming contours of the rock (331–32 [265–66]; 261–62). He spends so much time at these “puerile” pursuits that he fails to notice an oncoming rainstorm, gets lost in the forest, and wanders for two days in the wilderness until he happens upon Ralph and Indiana’s hut, where he hears their intriguing story. The novel’s fiction of its genesis therefore imitates Indiana’s creative practice of space—just like Indiana’s wandering, the fictional text invents new places, utopias, where the desire for a better world can exist in the space of a dream.

A spatial approach to *Indiana* enriches student understanding of the novel in a variety of ways. *Indiana* works well in a course on spatial discourse in French literature; students can draw comparisons and contrasts between Indiana and narratives of wandering in the picaresque novel (Rabelais’s *Gargantua*, Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste*), in surrealism (Breton’s *Nadja*), and in the works of the situationists. In a survey of nineteenth-century French literature, Indiana’s alienating experience of Parisian space could be compared with that of Rastignac in Honoré de Balzac’s *Le père Goriot* and with Charles Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* and *Le spleen de Paris* among countless others. In a course on women and space or gender and the city, Indiana’s desire for freedom of movement and a place to call her own resonates with feminist texts across the centuries, from Christine de Pizan’s *La cité des dames* and Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne* to Colette’s *La vagabonde* and Agnès Varda’s film *Sans toit ni loi*.

Indiana’s many different passages detailing the eponymous character’s wandering in Paris and in the wilderness lend themselves particularly well to in-class close-reading exercises. While these long, descriptive passages are often skimmed quickly by even experienced readers, they prove essential to an understanding of Indiana’s distinctive practice of space. To enhance student participation in the classroom, instructors might ask students to locate on a map at home all the places mentioned in a given passage. How many of the places still exist? How far did Indiana travel? What monuments could she have seen, and which ones does the text not mention? The layer function on *Google Earth* allows students to overlay a map of Paris from 1834 (only two years after the publication of *Indiana*) onto a satellite image of the city today; the map is part of the *David Rumsey Historical Map Collection* (<http://rumsey.geogarage.com/>). Looking at this map, the reader unfamiliar with Paris discovers that Indiana’s walk along the Seine begins at the Institut de France and continues past the Corps Législatif (today’s Assemblée Nationale), across the river from the Louvre. It is of course the Louvre she sees in the clouds above Île Bourbon. To get a feeling for the strangeness of nineteenth-century Paris, students might be encouraged to read selections from an English guidebook of the city from the time. An excellent choice would be Edward Planta’s *A New Picture of Paris*, published in Paris at regular intervals by Galignani; *Google Books* has dozens of scanned copies available from the 1820s and 1830s.

Finally, while it may seem quite strange to students that Indiana’s movement is so constrained and policed, a very productive exercise consists of asking students to describe their own practice of space. How often do they walk and to where (to work, to class, with friends)? Do they take public transportation? Who observes where they go (friends, parents, security guards)? Do they have any obstacles to their movement (curfews, restricted-access dorms)? With the profusion of GPS technologies and handheld devices, students are able to publicize more than ever before possible their every movement to friends and relatives but also to corporations and law enforcement officials. While social networking sites such as *Google Latitude* or *Foursquare* allow people to explore playfully their environments and broadcast their location to friends and interested strangers, our every movement is tracked and commercialized. Perhaps our practice of space is no less fraught than Indiana’s wandering in the 1830s.

NOTES

¹“Est un lieu l’ordre (quel qu’il soit) selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence. S’y trouve donc exclue la possibilité, pour deux choses, d’être à la même place. La loi du ‘propre’ y règne: les éléments sont les uns à côtés des autres, chacun situé en un endroit ‘propre’ et distinct qu’il définit. Un lieu est donc une configuration instantanée de positions. Il implique une indication de stabilité” “A place is an order (whatever it may be) according to which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. The possibility is therefore excluded, for two things, to occupy the same spot. The law of the “proper” rules there: elements are one *beside* the other, each situated in a spot “proper” and distinct to it that defines it. A place is therefore an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (Certeau 172–73; my trans.).

²According to Marc Augé, a “non-lieu” is a place where one cannot read social relations because these places are interchangeable and the people who pass through them remain anonymous.