

# Cultural and Aesthetic Space in the Encyclopedic Novel

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## Purpose

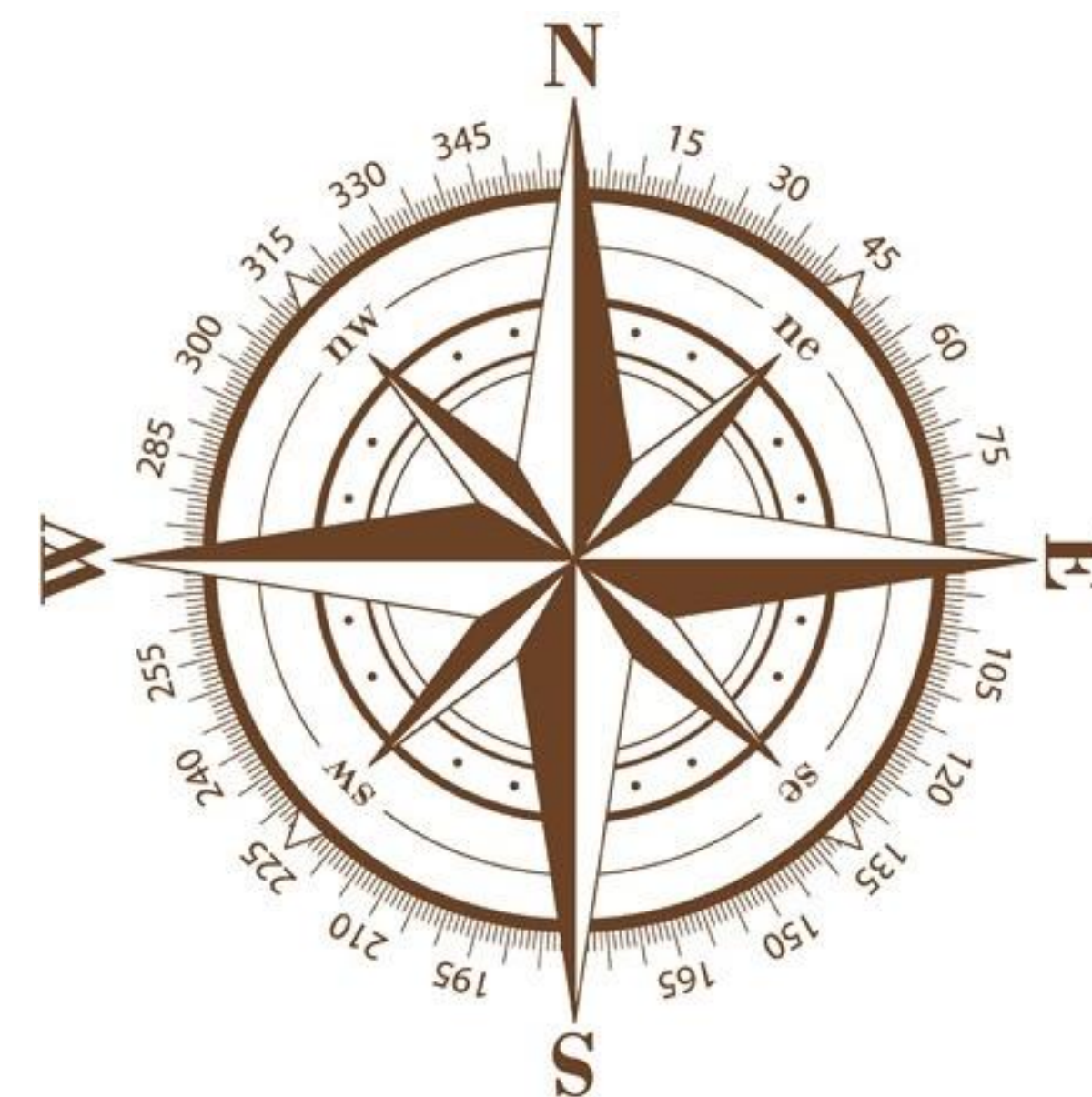
This project explores the cultural and aesthetic space across the novels *The Recognitions* and *Almanac of the Dead*. I have identified these two novels as encyclopedic novels – that is, they are epic, lengthy novels that cover certain areas of erudition. In *The Recognitions*, author William Gaddis explores the realm of counterfeiting works of art (seen below). In *Almanac of the Dead*, Leslie Marmon Silko focuses on the 500-year cultural and aesthetic history of colonial expansion in the Americas. By comparing these works I hope to establish a framework for thinking about cultural and aesthetic spaces across the genre of the postmodern and contemporary encyclopedic novel.



Hieronymus Bosch – *The Seven Deadly Sins*, which appears in *The Recognitions*-

## Process and Key Findings

- Scholar Tim Cresswell identifies places as always “in process” and continually constructed.
- Both cultural and aesthetic spaces are subject to “cartographical hegemony” – that is, control of space through institutions.
- Aesthetic regimes determine the value of artworks and the ways in which art is interpreted; in these novels, aesthetic regimes are inseparable from economic and political structures.



- Art as “counterfeit” of culture: art does not directly reflect reality, but instead is an isolation of cultural-historical elements; demonstrated in Gaddis’ counterfeit paintings and Silko’s almanac.
- Art generates cultural maps while cartographical mapmaking reflects the values of the dominant language and culture.
- Hegemonic vs. Rhizomatic methods of mapping – hegemonic maps seek to impose singular cultural values and erase culture, while rhizomatic maps work from the bottom up and are heterogeneous.
- The intersection of local and global spaces opens up the possibility of a rhizomatic cultural organization; this would resist the historical, cultural, and aesthetic hegemony imposed by European values.



Map from *Almanac of the Dead*

## Outcome and Implications

My research points towards a resistance against the hegemonic organization of cultural and aesthetic space through the genre of the encyclopedic novel. Both *The Recognitions* and *Almanac of the Dead* challenge institutional mapping by raising issues of the historical and cultural foundations of these maps, whether they are actual cartographical maps or aesthetic canvases. The process of hegemonic cartography has been shown to erase or marginalize the histories that are preserved in cultural artifacts or documents. The novels themselves form a rhizomatic means of resisting the hegemonic enterprises of European colonialism. This research could be expanded to encompass psychological and global cartography, which I plan on discussing in the future chapters of my thesis.