

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Literary Geography and The Spatial Hinge

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As an interdisciplinary project primarily led by theory and practice in human geography and literary studies, literary geographers have borrowed much of their terminology from these contributing disciplines. But, as this field continues to develop, scholars working in the area require their own vocabulary. As such, there is an increasing need to develop a sophisticated language and terminology which enables discussion not only of the whole range of textual geographies – internal, interconnective, and exterior – but also of the multitude of agents involved in their production. The ‘text-as-spatial-event’ (Hones 2008, 2014), for example, initiates such a vocabulary to articulate the relational dependency of texts and the various actants involved in their being/becoming.

Until recently, however, there has been no term to describe the shifting of extra-literary perception in the unfolding of literary worlds in actual-world settings that are otherwise unassociated with texts and which occur as a result of the ‘spatial event’. The recent introduction of the ‘spatial hinge’ accounts for this extension of literary space into extra-literary sites which feel to some readers as if they ‘share the same affective environment’ as the text (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 16-17). The ‘spatial hinge’ is a concept first developed in Thurgill and Lovell’s ‘Expanding Worlds: Place and Collaboration in (and after) the ‘Text-as-Spatial-Event’ (2019) as a means to describe the interaction between intra- and extra-textual space during and after the reading process. While the foundations for the conceptualisation of such a ‘hinge’ were laid down in the earlier short paper, the concept was underdeveloped, and proposed only as a possible way to think through the work that had resulted from an ongoing collaboration between a literary geographer (Thurgill) and a tourism studies scholar (Lovell). Since publication, however, the term ‘spatial hinge’ has started to appear in the work of literary geographers and literary scholars elsewhere (See Kothari 2020; Finch and Kelly

2021; McLaughlin, in press) and as such it is essential to define now more clearly what this hinge is and what it does and does not describe. The ‘spatial hinge’ names a process which extends a reading (and with it the text itself) into places previously unassociated with the text, which start to feel as if they belong to the text and, as a result, come to be experienced by readers as fundamental parts of its literary landscape, even where the author has made no connection to such a site in their writing. The concept of the ‘spatial hinge’ allows literary geographers to better examine the collaborative role of place as the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ unfolds through an extension of the extra-textual.

The language introduced via the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ (Hones 2008, 2014) provided literary geographers with the terminology needed to more accurately depict the spatial workings of texts. The complex relations between the *insideness*, *outsideness*, and *inbetweenness* of texts set out in such relational studies has had a clear impact on emerging work in literary geography, and the terminology developed there has influenced a number of recent geographical studies, including David McLaughlin’s examination of Sherlockians and the role of reader-generated mappings (2016, 2018), James Thurgill’s extra-textual encounters with the literal and figurative landscapes of M.R. James’ *Suffolk* (2018), and Evgenia Amey’s exploration of absence, reading and extra-textual space in the work of Tove Jansson (2021). As interest in the application of the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ continues to grow, it becomes ever more pressing to examine the way such events impact readers’ experiences of the world and shape their encounters with the extra-literary environment. The ‘spatial hinge’ was developed precisely as a way to further explore and elucidate the role of place in the text-as-spatial-event, specifically in a ‘post-reading’ scenario. The ‘hinge’ provides a unifying concept; one that has the potential ‘to reconsider the parameters of influence involved in the reading of literary texts, and moreover, to think about the ways in which the extra-textual might be used to show an extension or development of reading(s) and of space(s) that continues far beyond the text itself’ (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 16).

The ‘spatial hinge’ leads to a better understanding of the affective mechanism at work in the relationship between reader, text and place which allows for the actual-world to become re-imagined/influenced/inflected by a reader after or while a text is being read, and thus extends the geography of the text into actual-world places with which it might not ordinarily be associated. In its simplest form, then, the ‘spatial hinge’ articulates the affective process that allows an experience of place to become imbued with extra-literary details via the reading of an unassociated literary work. The ‘hinge’ pertains to a process that unfolds as part of the ‘text-as-spatial event’: it does not describe the practice of retracing or searching for extra-textual encounters which might expand on the experience of readers, discussed elsewhere (See McLaughlin 2016, 2018; Thurgill 2018). Furthermore, the ‘spatial hinge’ does not in itself articulate specific registers of affect as are found in, for example, studies of enchantment (Bennett 2001), the eerie (Fisher 2016), and the spectral (Holloway 2016). Rather, the ‘spatial hinge’ gives a name to the sensory triggers – aural, gustatory, haptic, olfactory, visual - that allow us to find echoes of texts in places unconnected to the world described by the author.

Such affective encounters with place are not uncommon. An internet search of London’s Goodwin’s Court, Covent Garden, for example, will present numerous descriptions

of its appearance as ‘Dickensian,’ and in fact the homepage of the Bulgari Hotel employs the headline ‘LIKE A PAGE OUT OF DICKENS’ to open their description of this cobbled, Georgian lane. A few lines later the hotel’s homepage points to Goodwin’s Court as the inspiration for ‘Knockturn Alley’ in Chris Columbus’ adaptations of J.K Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels, before going on to state: ‘But when night falls, especially when it’s foggy out, don’t be surprised if you hear the padded gait of Sherlock Holmes’ (Grego 2020). Obviously, such examples abound and so it becomes evident that texts and the literary worlds they imagine clearly influence the way people encounter sites otherwise unconnected to them. For geographers with a particular focus on the extra-textual, including those working with literary mapping and literary tourism, the ‘spatial hinge’, as a means to name the affective mechanism at work between text, reader and actual-world place(s), will be a useful addition to the vocabulary of the field. Using the ‘spatial hinge’ we can identify a process that, through various sensory triggers - sights, sounds, smells, feelings, tastes - expands the geography of the literary text into places it would not ordinarily be found.

Whether the result of the hinge’s operation affects the experiences of a single reader or multiple readers depends on whether such a re-imagining of place is or can be shared. While text events are often specific to the reader, the production of literary adaptations, tourism and theme parks suggests that to a certain degree the locating and experiencing of texts in extra-literary settings can be collective and communal. The ‘spatial hinge’ might also work in such a way so that even otherwise unrelated places can be connected to texts and experienced as an extension of them by multiple readers.

Jacques Derrida refers to a hinge (*brisure*) in his 1967 *Of Grammatology* to describe connections between the inner and outer worlds of thought and language. As Hillis Miller has observed:

‘Brisure’ means, at one and the same time, two opposed things: a hinge or joint that connects two separate things, and a break that divides two separate things. In both cases, the word ‘brisure’ names something that comes between, as both separator and connector. (2011: 41)

Where the conjoined elements alluded to by Derrida show both connection and separation to exist between thinking and wording, the ‘spatial hinge’ names the bleeding of texts into and out of actual-world sites, and further extends the role of the ‘text-as-spatial-event’. Of course, metaphors can be themselves problematic in so far as they demand a shared sense of a referent world in which the allusion should be understood. What is found to be clear in the mind of one reader may well lead to confusion in that of another. Yet, the use of the ‘hinge’ is vindicated precisely because of its paradoxically ‘fixed’ nature as ‘something that comes between, as both separator and connector’ (Hillis Miller 2011: 41).

Hinges operate in different ways depending on context. While I might envision an apparatus that allows a door to swing open and closed with ease, permitting movement into and out of spaces that are otherwise separated, another reader might well be picturing the hinged arm of an Anglepoise lamp; a hinge that allows for pivot or movement in an otherwise

fixed object. Yet, the hinge metaphor is, at its core, about this very affordance of movement; hinges, in whatever guise, are mechanisms that allow for mobility and flow, however limited, of people, objects, and ideas. The ‘spatial hinge’, meanwhile, allows a different kind of movement; a shift in perception, an affectual encounter with the extra-textual, that sees the transference and rendering of imagined geographies in actual-world spaces. Moreover, and most significant, the movement involved in this shifting of the extra-literary encounter that the ‘spatial hinge’ permits is no longer restricted to the actual-world sites associated with the text.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 20K12954.

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