Teksty Drugie 2016, 1, s. 165-183
Special Issue – English Edition

# From Poetics of Space to a Politics of Place: The Topographical Turn in Literary Studies

Elżbieta Rybicka

Elżbieta Rybicka

# From a Poetics of Space to a Politics of Place: The Topographical Turn in Literary Studies[1]

DOI:10.18318/td.2016.en.1.10

**Elżbieta Rybicka** – works at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. Her publications include *The Forms of the Labyrinth in the Polish Prose in the Twentieth Century* (2000), *Modernizing the City. Introduction to Urban Problematics in Modern Polish Literature* (2003), *Geopoetics. Space and Place in Contemporary Theories and Literary Practices* (2014). She specializes in the cultural and literary geography, urban culture and cultural memory.

## Spatial Turn or Topographical Turn?

The overabundance of so-called "turns" in the humanities today may lead rapidly to a kind of inflation or, as some suggest, to treading water, or to simply ending up back where we started. With those most recent shifts – the cultural turn, the iconographic turn, the performance turn – we are dealing not so much with temporary successors as we are with simultaneity and mutual influences. Of these, the most problematic in the Polish context appears to be the spatial/topographical turn. In fact, neither of those two variants has been firmly established or even attempted widely yet in Polish terminology, and the

1 This article is part of a larger project called *Geopoetics: Space and Place in Contemporary Literary Theory and Practice*, where ideas simply noted in passing here are developed in detail, such as the history and evolution of the field as well as the problem of the new regionalism, the relationship between literature and geography, and the question of space in theories of gender. It was also printed before, in *From Modern Theory to a Poetics of Experience: Polish Studies in Literary History and Theory*, ed. Grzegorz Grochowski and Ryszard Nycz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014).

status of the turn itself could be called into question. Magdalena Marszałek, for example, finds the notion of a topographical turn debatable:

> The question of the extent to which interest in geography and topo- and cartographical techniques creates a new paradigm in history, sociology, or cultural studies (the topographical turn) is debatable, while understanding geographic space in terms of cultural practices of the construction of territories, identity, and memory, is widely agreed upon across the disciplines.[2]

If we understand the spatial/topographical turn as a paradigm shift, then indeed doubts may be warranted. Labeling a trend in scholarship a "turn" does carry with it, however, the suggestion of something else, namely, a dynamic of action, a state in progress, a turning point, a reorientation. And I believe this is the case, as well, with the spatial turn: there is more dislocation than stabilization in it for now.[3] It is worth pointing out at the outset that this "turn" has its institutional anchoring in British and American "place studies;" it has its trade journals here (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*; *Gender, Place and Culture,* etc.), and its associations (Institut International de Géopoétique, Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, etc.). A signal of the paradigmatization of the spatial turn is also the proliferation of sub-disciplines from humanist geography and cultural geography to anthropology of place and space, geocriticism, and geopoetics.[4]

These institutional factors obviously stabilize the reorientation, though at the same time they may constitute a kind of commons for exchange and further circulation. In terms of why the so-called turn seems so attractive to literary studies, what appears most pertinent is the potential contained within a new language and lexicon, as well as the influx of concepts associated

2 Magdalena Marszałek, "*Pamięć, meteorologia oraz urojenia:* środkowoeuropejska geopoetyka Andrzeja Stasiuka," in *Literatura, kultura i język polski w kontekstach i kontaktach światowych. III Kongres Polonistyki Zagranicznej*, ed. Małgorzata Czermińska, Katarzyna Meller, Piotr Fliciński, Poznań 2007. This is the only article I am aware of dealing directly with the issue of the topographical turn in the context of Polish literature.

3 It took until 2008 for there to be an anthology of texts from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, political science, religious studies, cultural studies), namely, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Worf, Santa Arias (New York: Routledge, 2008).

4 *The Anthropology of Space and Place. Locating Culture,* ed. Setha M. Low, Denise Lawrence-Zúniga (Malden: Blackwell Publishing 2003); *La Geocritique: mode d'emploi*, ed. Bertrand Westphal (Limoges: PULIM, 2000).

with the spatial turn. That is why I am interested less in the pragmatics of it and more in the dynamic of contemporary reconfigurations of a spatial, thematic, and disciplinary nature; the trajectories of dislocations; as well as the active development of this area of interest. The spatial/topographical turn not only looks into contemporary space in movement, but is itself subject to ceaseless dislocations.

The question I want to focus on is also this problem of nomenclature and the question of whether this reorientation ought to be called a "spatial turn" or rather a "topographical turn." As similar as their meanings are, they are different in terms of territorial custom. They also cover distinct geographical territories, since "spatial turn" is employed mostly in Anglophone regions, which obviously lends it an additional power, while "topographical turn" is more common in Germanlanguage contexts.[5]

Yet particular territorial usages are less important than the pragmatics of general use in the contemporary context. "Topographical turn" has a decidedly greater and more attractive semantic potential, particularly for literary studies. Etymologically, topography as *topos graphos* – the description of space – has a more solid basis in the field of literary studies, not only with respect to a rich and long rhetorical tradition. In the contemporary conceptual landscape topography harmonizes with the conviction of literary and cultural shaping of space. It resonates perfectly, as well, with other related concepts – heterotopias and topotropography,[6] toponym and topology, atopia, utopia and dystopia, the atopic subject and atopiation.

For these reasons, I am inclined to consider the topographical turn a local, and perhaps positional, variant of the spatial turn, local meaning having to do with the domain of *graphein*, where a linguistic approach to space is considered a valuable one. Meanwhile the spatial turn I treat as a useful formula having to do with the contemporary rise in interest in space in the different disciplines and artistic practices. These concepts can obviously be used interchangeably, provided, however, that it is understood that they come from different fields and have been tools of different disciplinary languages, which means that the relationship between them is currently one of a chiasmatic nature.

The trajectories determined by the topographical turn lead to a range of areas of writing and literary research. Of the examples of direction that interest can take, regionalism is especially important, and in particular, the so-called

5 The foundational text is Sigrid Weigel's article "Zum 'topographical turn:' kartographie, topographie und raumkonzepte in den kulturwissenschaften," *KulturPoetik* 2 (2002).

6 This term is taken from Joseph Hillis Miller, *Topograhies* (Berkely: Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995).

new regionalism. Thematic spatiology as a traditional field (spatial topics in the home, yard, hills, deserts, etc.) is reinterpreted and now read most often from the perspective of gender, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies, or in conjunction with the construction of national identity. That latter deserves its own note – as it creates an extensive section of ideological literary landscapes (this is most actively pursued in British "place studies") and directing attention toward modern dislocations of space and identity.[7] This direction of study results from the conviction that literature creates and transmits national landscapes and ideological places; Poland is an excellent example of this, having created in the nineteenth century a national spatial repertoire of topoi founded in the opposition between city and country.[8]

The fact that spatial categories might be attractive analytical instruments in researching the relationships between national identity and literature – even on a scale as large as centuries-old Portuguese literature – is confirmed by Ewa Łukaszyk's book *Terytorium a* świat. *Wyobrażeniowe konfiguracje przestrzeni w literaturze portugalskiej od schyłku* średniowiecza *do współczesności* [*Territory and World: Imagining the Configurations of Space in Portuguese Literature from the Late Middle Ages to Modernity*].[9] Łukaszyk's book traces the developmental dynamics of Portuguese conceptualizations of space, evolving from the notion of national territory as a space that had to be ceaselessly expanded by the power of the religious myth (legitimizing imperial conquest) through the collapse of that vision and ultimately twentieth-century nomadism. National mythic geography is interpreted as an instrument serving to confirm the sense of identity in connection with a given territory. Łukaszyk's proposed conceptual toolbox (territory, border, itinerary, nomadism, diaspora, "mythic geography") can be treated as its own modern repertoire of topoi, *loci communis* that form a commons of writing, literary history, ethnic studies, and national mythology.

The issue of the relationship between place and literature is complex and linked to many other realms in a variety of different ways. It may have to do

7 Bernard Sharrat, "Writing Britains," in *British Cultural Studies: Geography, Nationality, and Identity*, ed. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

8 I wrote more about this in the book *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas 2003), 48-53. See Ewa Ihnatowicz "Kiedy kamienica jest a kiedy nie jest domem polskim," in *Obraz domu w kulturach słowiańskich*, ed. Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa, Andrzej Z. Makowiecki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Wydział Polonistyki, 1997).

9 Ewa Łukaszyk, *Terytorium a świat. Wyobrażeniowe konfiguracje przestrzeni w literaturze portugalskiej od schyłku średniowiecza do współczesności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003).

with the relationships of writers to concrete places, such as familial places or those visited on trips. The connections between these places and literature can be described, as Robert Packard describes them, in terms of "refraction" – a term borrowed from optics – if one assumes that literature is a prism that transforms authentic loci into literary places.[10] That relationship can also be understood, however, from the perspective of a geography of literary *milieux*, where concrete places become a creative space enabling literary or artistic activity. An impressive example of this approach is Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* – a fascinating tale of how Left Bank Paris became the birthplace of an alternate version of modernism in the early part of the twentieth century.[11]

In the most general terms, it is now commonly accepted that literature and geographical place are not mutually exclusive but are rather complementary, engaged in ceaseless negotiations with one another.[12]

Meanwhile, research on the city in literature is still actively being developed, powered now by new ideas from postcolonial studies and the new literary geography. There are innumerable examples, but the most representative of the current literary phase of urban studies seem to be texts dealing with the specifics of today's cultural situation in former colonial metropolises, and in particular, London. Postcolonial London is an especially acute problem in much critically acclaimed literature (Naipaul, Rushdie, Smith, Kureishi, Malkami), which tends to show with photographic clarity the contemporary stratifications and ethnic, national, religious, gender-based, and cultural shifts there[13] – which is why it is worth dedicating a little more space to this phenomenon now. When examined from the perspective of new spatial reconfigurations, the question of the old dichotomous and hierarchical relations between metropolis and colonies come to the fore, this being the foundation for colonial and postcolonial discourse and contributing to the next evaluative oppositions based on domination and subordination (center-periphery,

10 See for example Robert Packard, *Refractions: Writers and Places* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1990), 3.

11 Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

12 See one of the most recent anthologies dedicated to this topic: *Literature and Place 1800-2000*, ed. Peter Brown, Michael Irwin (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

13 Kevin Robins, "Endnote: To London: The City beyond the Nation," in *British Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kevin Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Peter Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations* (London: Palgrave, 2002); Sławomir Kuźnicki, *"Miasto widzialne, lecz nie widziane.* Londyn w *Szatańskich wersetach* Salmana Rushdiego," in *Miasto. Przestrzeń, topos, człowiek*, ed. Adrian Gleń, Jacek Gutorow, Irena Jokiel (Opole: Uniwersytet Opolski – Instytut Filologii Polskiej, 2005).

East-West and in the urban structure of cities: order-chaos). Unmediated contact between inhabitants of the metropolis and the colonies in the colonial era led either to the proclamation and confirmation of "strong," "pure," and essential identities (e.g. Jean Rhys' *Voyage in the Dark*), or – as in V.S. Naipaul (*The Mimic Men*) – to the imitation of the imperial cultural pattern.

The fall of the empire is succeeded on the one hand by the decentralization of the metropolis by the influx of immigrants from the periphery, undermining the system from within and transforming the old hierarchies while also creating a qualitatively new "third space" of cultural hybridization (in Homi Bhabha's understanding). The process of dismantling that opposition, however, is accompanied by the appearance of the next one: the reproduced metropolis-colonies relationship now exists within the metropolis itself, in the guise of the opposition between center and the suburbs that, in Europe, condemn their residents to marginalization[14] (examples include Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia or Zadie Smith's White Teeth*). As a consequence of these processes, the space of the city, the former metropolis, becomes a territory of struggle, conflict, and violence against an ethno-religious backdrop (e.g. Kureishi's *Black Album* and *Londonistan* by Gautam Malkami), and the old cultural and ethnic difference between metropolis and colony – which once served as the origins of domination – now becomes an object of consumption and multicultural fashion, itself sometimes interpreted as neocolonialism. From the point of view of literary scholarship, the fact that the spatial relations and their reconfiguration launch a new analytical lexicon in research on colonial and postcolonial literature (culture), including categories of ethnicity, race, class, geography, the problems of globalization, transculturation, hybridization, and the politics of representation is also important.

Ecocriticism leads in yet another direction, and although its connection with the topographical turn may be debatable, they do both share the category of place. The most concise definition of ecocriticsm is that it prioritizes research on the relationship between literature and the environment, nature and culture.[15] The repertoire of questions asked by ecocriticism goes something like this:

---

14 See *Cities on the Margin, on the Margin of Cities: Representations of Urban Space in Contemporary Irish and British Fiction*, ed. Philippe Laplace, Éric Tabuteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2003).

15 This is, of course, one of many definitions of ecocriticism, featured in Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), XVIII.

> How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should p l a c e become a new critical category? Do men write about nature differently than women do? In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? How has the concept of wilderness changed over time? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? What view of nature informs U.S. Government reports, corporate advertising, and televised nature documentaries, and to what rhetorical effect? What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies? How is science itself open to literary analysis? What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art, history, and ethics?[16]

The close relationship with the topographical turn is also the result of the fact that ecocriticism – as a new discipline, therefore seeking an anchor for itself in the past and in tradition – has included in its territory terrains that have long been explored. The question of literary representations of nature, for instance, is that sort of traditional arena of inquiry.

The questions above, as formulated by Cheryll Glotfelty in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, are a terrific example of the characteristic features of modern trans-disciplinary thinking. This new orientation in literary studies is, after all, a response to the processes and phenomena of the world (in particular, the ecological crisis), without, however, straying too far from its own backyard: that is, what is specific to literary studies. It is skillfully in dialogue with the tradition of its own discipline and yet simultaneously unafraid of opening up to new ideas and disciplines not strictly literary.

These trajectories may sometimes appear to simply be returns to old, familiar places. However, the modern cultural context lends them new meaning. So it is, for example, with the case of regionalism, whose revision and re-envisioning we owe to postmodern culture. Regional literature was treated as a secondary phe-nomenon until the 1970s and 1980s, and it was only its rising popularity from the 1960s on in the United States that new ways of interpreting and evaluating it came into being. The relationship with postmodernism is, in this case, also quite complicated – new regionalism appeared in literature alongside postmodernism, and both they

16 Ibid., XIX.

shared a critique of elitist modernism, especially its universalist usurping. As much as literary postmodernism was geared toward formal experimentation, however, and uninterested in geography and topography, so new regionalism did opt for realist techniques, placing location at the fore in a very clear way. This is also why it tended to be treated by the critics as a reaction to postmodern confusion or a way of escaping the chaos of postmodern culture.[17]

Now, however, new regionalism is most indebted to minority discourses, and especially to theories of postcoloniality. Local and regional narratives are treated as a kind of emancipatory strategy and a critical response to the Great National Stories on the one hand while, on the other, as a reaction to globalizing atopias and non-places. New regionalism also enters into a curious relationship with the surregional, that is, with what is now the global. Salman Rushdie provides an apt and succinct summary of this in a novel that is both regional and cosmopolitan, about both Kashmir and Los Angeles: every place, he argues, is part of all other places.[18] Finally, new regionalism is not merely a variety of literature about concrete places, or located in such places; it is also "an attempt to find a new place from which to study literature."[19]

The spatial turn, as I wrote above, is connected with other turns: cultural, iconographic, performance. The most significant was definitely the cultural turn, which lent literature and literary studies (as well as humanities as a whole) placement and displacement at once. Placing or situating research is not only a metaphor: more and more importance is given to the fact of the geographical "position" of the researcher (often an immigrant) as well as to the place that person has come from, as well as the place that person went when he or she did leave. The biographies of Edward Said, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and many others that are either embedded in the introductions to their books or contained in separate texts are ample demonstration of this. Citing and publicizing their biographical context is not, in their case, simply an element of self-representation, but rather a strategy of self-placing, thanks to which their lives actually act as testaments to the trans-positionality of the theories they advocate. Roberto M. Dainotto writes interestingly of the new position of the intellectual in today's world:

17 See Jerzy Durczak, "1960-1980: nowy regionalizm," in *Historia literatury amerykańskiej XX wieku*, vol. 2, ed. Agnieszka Salska (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 372.

18 Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (New York: Random House, 2006).

19 Roberto Dainotto, *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 4.

> If the old modernist intellectual, fundamentally a *deraciné*, saw literature as a "strategy of permanent exile" and fundamental displacement [...] the new intellectual rather likes to pose as a topologist: S/he speaks f r o m one specific place of cultural production and a b o u t a localized "geography of the imagination" within whose borders a given literary utterance may remain significant, relevant, and even intelligible. "Positionality" [...] is the magic word, and you'd better take it literally.[20]

Place and position, let us recall, play a double role here: that of geographical location and that of research method.

The relationship between the spatial turn and the cultural turn cannot, however, be understood as one of cause-and-effect nor as a relationship of successors. More apt is a metaphor of circulation, which is also the conclusion to which we are led in the remarks on the significance of geography for culture *in Introduction to Cultural Studies*:

> One increasingly important aspect of cultural studies is what can be called the geographies (or, indeed, topographies) of culture: the ways in which matters of meaning are bound up with spaces, places and landscapes. One sign of this is that the language of cultural studies is full of spatial metaphors [...] Yet there is more to this than just language since there is also a sense that culture – particularly when it is understood as something that is plural, fragmented and contested – cannot be understood outside the spaces that it marks out (like national boundaries or gang territories), the places that it makes meaningful [...] the landscapes that it creates (from "England's green and pleasant land" to the suburban shopping mall).[21]

The most important consequence of the cultural turn for topographical methods does appear to be the reconfiguration of the relationship between literature (and literary studies) and geography.

## Culture, Literature, Geography: Flows and Reconfigurations

Shifting interest from the poetics of imaginary spaces to the interactions between literature and real spaces necessarily creates opportunities

20 Ibid., 3.

21 Brian Longhurst, et al., *"Topographies of Culture: Geography, Meaning, and Power,"* in *Introducing Cultural Studies* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008), 130.

to renegotiate the limits between literary studies and geography, especially since over the course of recent years both partners in that trans-disciplinary dialogue have changed.

The door was initially opened by humanist geography, which was developed in the 1970s as a form of resistance to the quantitative methodology that then dominated the field. Humanist geographers, then, treated polemically the idea of space as formulated by the hard sciences and subsequently adapted for a geography with pseudo-scientific ambitions, opposing to it approaches especially interested in its anthropological and cultural dimension.[22] Space, along with the subject experiencing it, thus became a commons where geography and other areas of study – such as sociology (to invoke but Florian Znaniecki's "humanities coefficient") and anthropology – intermingled. But it wasn't only those areas, because both the object of study (place as experienced by man, cultural landscape), as well as the new hermeneutics (emphasis placed on understanding, and not explaining) also brought humanist geography ever nearer literary studies.

For this reason, too, literature became an important point of reference for humanist geographers, important insofar as it may constitute justification for and confirmation of their theories of place. Literary representations of landscapes read by geographers may in fact reveal both the specifics of individual experience and interpretations of space as well as the cultural framework for that type of reading. A Polish example of this is Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk discussing the significance of landscape in the prose of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński:

> For the description of landscape, for the writer as well as for anyone else set in said landscape, the construction of meanings, and seeing is the lending of sense to looking, reaching all the way down into hidden, invisible dimensions of reality […] In other words, there is in the description something that the landscape itself does not contain and that is exclusively the product and property of the vision of the person watching […] From the perspective of humanist geography, everything Herling-Grudziński inscribes into his landscapes is important – that is, what in the description of landscape is the beginning of new meanings.[23]

22 See Krzysztof H. Wojciechowski, "Koncepcje przestrzeni geografii humanistycznej," in *Przestrzeń w nauce współczesnej*, ed. Stefan Symotiuka and Grzegorz Nowaka (Lublin: Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowska, 1998).

23 Dobiesław Jędrzejczyk, "Krajobraz kulturowy jako metafora bytu," in *Kultura jako przedmiot badań geograficznych. Studia teoretyczne i regionalne*, ed. Elżbieta Orłowska (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Geograficzne, 2002), 21, 22.

For humanist geographers, literature is also important as a source of examples of *genius loci* that might escape the grasp of other, more scientific methods, as well as ways of experiencing space and lending it affective hues.[24] In other words, literature provides the language for understanding "mute" and "anonymous" territories, and it is thanks to this that they are able to signify.

And now comes the question of whether or not the relationship between the disciplines also worked in the other direction – that is, was humanist geography also a source of inspiration for literary scholars? Certainly some members of that school, especially Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward T. Hall, did inspire scholars of literature, and distinguishing between place and space has benefited a variety of disciplines.

Beata Tarnowska's *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* [*Poetic Geography in Czesław Miłosz's Postwar Work*] is an important and extremely thorough book within Polish literary criticism.[25] Its object is Miłoszean topographies, poetic descriptions of American landscapes, as well as Lithuanian and French landscapes, considered along two axes: the geographic and the metaphysical. Place, that is, the fundamental category drawn from the discourse of humanist geography, attains a dual status and is both a concrete place on Earth, experienced and interpreted, as well as Place, with its symbolic meaning.

The need to renegotiate between literary scholarship and geography does result from a series of new challenges, since what acts now as the principle impulse to bringing them closer together is the cultural turn, which has transformed both disciplines – opening them up to one another and providing a repertoire of shared questions, problems, and ideas. Of course this process affected all of the humanities in delineating a new map – though it ought immediately to be stipulated that the metaphors of maps and mapping that appear more and more frequently are too static to reflect the dynamic and quite transversal nature of these transformations. If we are sticking with visual-spatial metaphors, then more apt might be the multi-dimensional metaphor of the map of migrations and trajectories of wandering concepts, movements, and displacements, where established borders undergo dislocations, and the spatial dimension – albeit against Cartesian logic – must be supplemented with the historical.

---

24 Hanna Libura, "Geografia i literatura," *Przegląd Zagranicznej Literatury Geograficznej* 4 (1990): 107-114.

25 Beata Tarnowska, *Geografia poetycka w powojennej twórczości Czesława Miłosza* (Olsztyn: Wyższa Szkoła Psychologiczna, 1996).

The evolution of humanist geography into cultural geography was a consequence of the cultural turn within the field of geography,[26] the latter being linked to the former by the recognition of cultural mediation as the basic framework for the experience of space, but it is different in its decidedly greater emphasis on the question – to invoke today's mantra – of race, class, and gender, sensitivity to issues of power and symbolic violence as well as the politics of representation.

What, then, unites both disciplines after the cultural turn? The link seems to be the rejection of those definitions of culture that treat it as the product of an intellectual elite, the recognition of its positionality, the situation of it within local parameters, research into popular culture, an emphasis on cultural pluralism, and the idea that culture is a battlefield. For example, Peter Jackson, one scholar associated with cultural geography, defines culture in a manner clearly borrowed from British cultural studies, as "a domain in which economic and political contradictions are contested and resolved,"[27] although of course, as he immediately adds, it cannot be reduced to those economic and political contradictions. The fundamental question posed by the new cultural geography of how culture lends meaning to places and spaces also applies to literary practices and research.

The flow of cultural and geographical concepts into literary research leads, meanwhile, to the next reconfigurations – to literary geography being more open than it once was to the "positional" dimensions of literary texts. As much as literary geography in the Polish context is commonly thought to be an auxiliary area for the research of the spatial location and activity of literary life,[28] other conceptions exist within, for example, Anglophone literary geography. Beginning with the obvious, that is, research into the interaction between literary representations of authentic geographical places and those

26 Chris Philo, "More Words, More Words, Reflections on the «Cultural Turn» and Human Geography," in *Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography*, ed. Ian Cook, et al. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2000). For a comprehensive introduction to the problematics of cultural geography see Mike Crang's *Cultural Geography* (London, New York: Routledge, 1998).

27 Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1989), 1.

28 Amongst the newer works see, for example, Jowita Kęcińska's *Geografia* życia *literackiego na Pomorzu* (Słupsk: Instytut Kaszubski, 2003). NB: for the sake of precision in distinguishing between the fields, it may indeed be better to refer to this, as Kęcińska does, as "geography of literary life."

places,[29] and continuing on to such tasks as situating literature in global contexts. The anthology *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* gives a number of diverse examples of literary geography after the cultural term, reading modernism after the topographical turn. The rationale for the reconfiguration of modernism in terms of geography and cultural criticism, say the editors of that volume, is the fact that our situation in the world, as well as our conceptions of home, work, travel, information, as well as the cultural identities that emerge from those, are the object of radical change.[30] That change applies equally to modernism in literature, which should be reviewed from the perspective of colonial history, at the very least.

A wonderful and inspiring example in Poland of literary geography is Dorota Kołodziejczyk's work, which combines an analysis of the new spatial imagination in Anglophone literature with the categories of cultural geography.[31] What is more, it sets in motion and dislocates spatial metaphors, making use, for example, of Foucault's heterotopias in order to describe postcolonial identity:

> Instead of the universalizing historicism of postcolonialism, he proposes a differentiating cartography of subjectivity in which the situating of the subject, its positionality, its internal tension between movement (migration, travel, uprooting) and staying in place (making a home, establishing roots) shows identity as a heterotopia: a place where several different, often incompatible or mutually unfamiliar spaces. Using the definition of heterotopias from strictly spatial categories to categories of identity has a revolutionary effect – it shows the inadequacy of the dichotomy of self/other, indispensable to the analytical goals in constructing a coherent identity but casting the danger of crisis and inward inconsistency safely onto the outside.[32]

---

29 Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, "Introduction: Locating the Modern," in *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Routledge: London, New York 2005), 2.

30 See for example Jeri Johnson's "Literary Geography: Joyce, Woolf and the City," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Melbourne: Blackwell 2002).

31 Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Antropologiczne fabulacje – hybryda, tłumaczenie, przynależność we współczesnej powieści anglojęzycznej," in *Ojczyzny słowa. Narracyjne wymiary kultury,* ed. Wojciech J. Burszta, Waldemar Kuligowski (Poznań: Biblioteka Telgte, 2002); Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Kolonialne kontury, globalne przemieszczenia. Nowa wyobraźnia przestrzenna w literaturze i teorii kultury," *Czas Kultury* 2 (2002); Dorota Kołodziejczyk, "Trawersem przez glob: studia postkolonialne i teoria globalizacji," *Er(r)go* 1 (2004).

32 Kołodziejczyk, "Trawersem przez glob: studia postkolonialne i teoria globalizacji," 21.

**What is New in Theories of Space?**

The cultural reorientation of both disciplines reveals their multiple and complex connections to processes transforming culture both at a macro- and a micro-level – amongst which might be mentioned globalization, the hybridization of cultures, the development of new media and new communication technologies, tourism, ecology, and the environmental crisis. Theories of these processes and phenomena have provided a new set of questions as well as answers, but above all, they have led to new conceptions of space. Simplifying somewhat, contemporary thought on space after the cultural turn is characterized by the following tendencies:

1. the chiasmatic understanding of the relationship between space on the one hand and language, literature, and culture on the other;
2. a view of space that is not essentialist, but rather dynamic – space as variable configurations or transitional spaces, non-places;
3. combination of spatiality with temporality;
4. a return of the category of place, and with it the accentuation of the local and regional, as well as other (gender, ethnic, class, cultural) parameters of the scholar, writer, or artistic practices, in addition to the problematizing of local-global oppositions, connected with the above;
5. particular interest in hybrid spaces, heterotopias, and borderlands;
6. a shift of perspective from ontology to ideology, from mimesis to the pragmatics of power over space, from universal mythification to symbolic violence, from the poetics of space to the politics of place;
7. the idea that literature performatively invokes, creates, and lends meaning to space.

The chiasmatic understanding of the relationship between space and language has been most aptly formulated by Ewa Rewers in her book *Język i przestrzeń w poststrukturalistycznej filozofii kultury* [*Language and Space in Poststructuralist Cultural Philosophy*] which was, incidentally, the harbinger of the spatial turn in Polish humanities. The textualization of space and the spatialization of discourse as two inseparable and mutually influencing processes had as their goal above all the dismantling "the relationship, established in the tradition, especially the philosophical tradition, but immeasurably more complex, between language and space, logos and logosphere, text and environment, speech and *khora*."[33]

If something new might be added to these findings, it is worth noting those critics who testify to the limitations of the "cultural" and anthropocentric conception of space, these critics appearing, among other places, in ecocriticism.

33 Ewa Rewers, *Język i przestrzeń w poststrukturalistycznej filozofii kultury* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1996), 8.

Secondly, it is also worth nothing that the current understanding of language points more and more frequently to its ideological and political dimension.[34] One of the localizations (and dislocations) of culture consists in the fact that there is no way to point up essentialist, universal conceptions and definitions of space and place.[35] It is thus worthwhile to recall Tim Edensor's book *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life*, extremely valuable not only in terms of its original characterization of the eponymous issue, but also because it is particularly representative for contemporary thought on space and place. It takes into account above all the fact that both our conceptualizations of space, as well as our cultural spatial practices, including those that come from the sphere of every life, are a dynamic configuration undergoing ceaseless transformations. Edensor does not ask, in other words, what space is, and he does not come up with any "theory" of space, but in drawing on diverse cultural experiences, he does show places as constellations of variables.

Edensor does emphasize that at the level of everyday experiences, of equal importance is the setting of that experience within the world of culture (elite and popular), ideology, ideas, and immersion in pre-reflexive and somatic experience. The ability to perceive and to weave into the scholarly narrative that private experience, that appreciation of a child's perception of places, which outlines that primal, not yet pragmatic, but entertaining map of the space of the everyday, allows the discourse of contemporary theory to attain an important counterpoint here. In a word, Edenson understands space as a dynamic configuration of ideology, everyday life, and sensuality.[36]

A significant feature of current spatial research is also its tying together spatiality with temporality, geography with history. This was how Michel Foucault was already viewing heterotopias: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies."[37] From a different perspective historicity was set in space by Pierre Nora when he created the conception of

---

34 See among others bell hooks' "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," in *From Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cutural Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 1989).

35 Peter Brooker, for example, does not define place or space in his Glossary, placing them positionally in with different contemporary theories. Peter Brooker, *A Glossary of Cultural Theory* (London: Arnold, 2002).

36 Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture, and Everyday Life* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2002). This type of thinking about spaces and places derives, at least in part, from specific developments in British cultural studies, which after Raymond Williams accept the broad definition of culture as "lifestyle."

37 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* March (1984). English translation by Jay Miskowiec.

places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*). In the social sciences, meanwhile, David Harvey recognized timespace compression as a quality specific to postmodern culture. Also noteworthy is research on "geohistory," of which, in Poland, a terrific example is the work developed by art historian Piotr Piotrowski.[38]

In discussing the return of place in contemporary theories, we must first, of course, recall the crisis of the traditional concept of the place, its erosion, disappearance, or depreciation. Usually the phenomenon of placelessness, to use Edward Relph's term, is linked to modernizing processes, with societal and economic transformations on the one hand and, on the other, a notion of nation marginalized by local and regional values. The visual testimony to those universalist pretensions of modernization was clearly architecture's International Style, while further development only strengthened mobility (and thus the absence of belonging to a place) as well as the homogenization of the landscape, as Edward Relph believes. The problem of place erosion affects numerous cultural phenomena significant in supermodernity, according to Marc Augé.[39] His brand of non-places (non-lieux) calls attention to the transitive character of contemporary spaces, the transient spheres of airports and train stations, shopping malls and amusement parks.

But if one wished to address the return of place now, emphasis would be placed on questions of locality – though it ought to be pointed out at once that this is a locality after the spatial turn, and therefore one undergoing dislocation, reoriented, set in motion, and understood positionally, and thus in relation primarily to global processes. Their mutual entanglement is emphasized, of course, by theories of glocalization, Doreen Massey's "global sense of place," or Arjun Appadurai's "global production of locality."

Nor is it difficult to discern that the spatial turn has been directed particularly at certain places on the world map. At border regions, sites of subordination, ancient metropolises – that is, at wherever space is subject to circulation, dislocations, and symbolic violence. These are seconded by theories of the hybridization of culture and identity, Edward Said's "real-and-imagined space," Gloria Anzaldúa's "new mestiza," and Homi Bhabha's "third space," among others. All of these demonstrate the importance of these frontier territories for contemporary culture, as well as the importance of new conceptualizations of individual and collective identity. Of course, it is difficult to determine to what extent the interest in border space is the effect of contemporary

38 Piotr Piotrowski, "Drang nach Westen," in *Sztuka według polityki. Od „Melancholii" do „Pasji"* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

39 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1992).

theories of hybridization, creolization, and mestization,[40] and to what extent those concepts originate in the experiences of such spaces. That question would, in any case, be a poorly formulated one – better, yet again, would be the vantage point of circulation.

The question of the transition from poetics of space to politics of place deserves special attention, because it is the most likely to spark controversy. As self-evident as that transition is in the discourse of the humanities in the west, politics and ideology remain ghosts of the Polish humanities. On the other hand, the embeddedness of literary representations of space in power is a self-evident problem, though it ought to be added at once that it is unusually susceptible to trivialization and over-application.

For the purposes of culturally-oriented literary research, we can distinguish several "fields" showing the effects of a politics of place. Firstly, politics of place is a linguistic issue, as well as an issue of lexicon and of the question of to what extent power over space is articulated in language. A simple example is: border or frontier? Recovered territories or territories obtained?[41]

Secondly, politics of place is a sphere of imagology, or, to employ Edward Said's term, imaginative geography, and thus a question of the significance of the literary representation of space in creating an *imaginarium* important for an image and/or constructing ethnic, national, social, and gender identities. An example could be the problem of power in space from the perspective of gender – from the ideology of the hearth[42] through the dominance of public space over private space to the subjugation of the female body in a university building that used to be a barracks.

Third, politics of place can also definitely be spoken about in a much more rudimentary way, that is, in terms of the creation of a community based on similar spatial and geopolitical experiences. An example of this might be Katharina Raabe's and Monika Sznajderman's *Znikająca Europa* [*Europe Vanishing*], which constructs an alternative (and imaginative at once) geography

40 See Adam Nobis, "Kategoria hybrydyzacji kultury w dyskusjach, sporach i koncepcjach globalizacji," in *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 3 (2007), on issues of hybridization.

41 Suggestive examples of this type of linguistic "politics of place" are provided in the volume *Kresy – dekonstrukcja*, ed. Krzysztof Trybuś, et al. (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2007). [Translator's note: the questions in Polish are of "kresy" or "pogranicza," and "ziemie odzyskane" or "uzyskane." These definitions refer specifically to historical issues of Polish geography, the former to the eastern regions of what is now Poland and what is now Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine, and the latter refer to formerly Prussian lands, now Polish (again)].

42 See Lora Romero, "Bio-Political Resistance in Domestic Ideology and Uncle Tom's Cabin," *American Literary History*, 1 (4) Winter (1989): 715-734.

of an "other" forgotten European community. It also reveals the performative dimension of literary representations, creating a new map of Europe.

## In Lieu of Predictions

> It can be reasonably expected that the issue of literary space will in the near future occupy a place as privileged in poetics as have once – quite recently, in fact – the problematic of narrator and narrative situation, the problematic of time, the problematic of the morphology of plot or – very recently indeed – the problematic of dialogic and dialogism.[43]

Janusz Sławiński's article, which contains the above citation, was published in 1978 and was the introduction to a volume entitled *Przestrzeń i literatura* [*Space and Literature*]. Reading both his article and the rest of the collection almost forty years later is conducive to comparisons – historical but not exclusively – as well as to a certain amount of skepticism. In fact, after that reading, making predications on the future of the topographical turn in Polish literary studies would be risky business. Nonetheless, I do consider the new areas of research and spatial concepts valuable in the pursuit of Polish literature because – and here I quote Sławiński again – "the need for an exchange of languages of study along with its attendant reformulations of well-known topics, diagnoses, and theses is also one of the most basic driving forces in work in the humanities."[44]

That type of revision and new language is undoubtedly required by the question of a regionalism that in Poland has been reduced to a nostalgic and escapist variant of "local patriotism," while of course the ideological project of a homogenous national culture effacing regional differences and local histories is a problem that both pre- and post-dates World War II. The concept of an open (and simultaneously critical) regionalism developed in Borussia did not become widely known, but it could serve as a starting point for further research. Thus it is perhaps local narratives that are most in need of examination from a new perspective.[45]

---

43 Janusz Sławiński, "Przestrzeń w literaturze: elementarne rozróżnienia i wstępne oczywistości," in *Przestrzeń i literatura*, ed. Michał Głowiński and Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978), 9.

44 Ibid., 10.

45 See Inga Iwasiów, "Inna uległość. Trudne początki szczecińskiej lokalności," in *Narracje po końcu (wielkich) narracji*, ed. Hanna Gosk (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, 2007).

Within the Polish tradition, it would be interesting to take another look at the relationship between literature and geography – obviously incorporating the nineteenth- century work of Wincenty Pol. Similarly, geographical discourse analysis and its literary aspects might also be incorporated into the analysis of anthropological writing (e.g., the "painterly geography" of Wacław Nałkowski).

The question of the relationship between subject and place (or non-place) is also worth considering in the new topographical lexicon. Spatial categories actually act now as the parameters for comprehending individual subjectivity (homo geographicus, the atopic entity), as well as collective, local, regional, and cosmopolitan identities.

In any case, the horizon for geopoetics seems wide open, all the more so since, as I have attempted to demonstrate, although the term itself – topographical/spatial turn – is not really used in Poland, much existing Polish research could, in fact, be related to it. These initiatives, scattered over different disciplines, also show that the new spatial imaginary is not only the object of research, but also a fact pertaining to the theoretical and critical awareness of the scholar, important because it leads to a reconfiguration of the humanities as a whole. The inspiration of the spatial turn does, however, require local sensitivity and global openness.