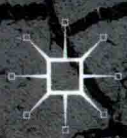


Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies

Literature's
Sensuous
Geographies

Postcolonial
Matters of Place

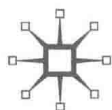
Sten Pultz Moslund



LITERATURE'S SENSUOUS GEOGRAPHIES
POSTCOLONIAL MATTERS OF PLACE

Sten Pultz Moslund

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LITERATURE'S SENSUOUS GEOGRAPHIES

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Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies

Series Editor:

ROBERT T. TALLY JR., Texas State University

Series description:

Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies is a new book series focusing on the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature. The spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has occasioned an explosion of innovative, multidisciplinary scholarship in recent years, and geocriticism, broadly conceived, has been among the more promising developments in spatially oriented literary studies. Whether focused on literary geography, cartography, geopoetics, or the spatial humanities more generally, geocritical approaches enable readers to reflect upon the representation of space and place, both in imaginary universes and in those zones where fiction meets reality. Titles in the series include both monographs and collections of essays devoted to literary criticism, theory, and history, often in association with other arts and sciences. Drawing on diverse critical and theoretical traditions, books in the Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies series disclose, analyze, and explore the significance of space, place, and mapping in literature and in the world.

Robert T. Tally Jr. is Associate Professor of English at Texas State University, USA. His work explores the relations among narrative, representation, and social space in American and world literature, criticism, and theory. Tally has been recognized as a leading figure in the emerging fields of geocriticism, spatiality studies, and the spatial humanities. Tally's books include *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*; *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique*; *Utopia in the Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World System*; *Spatiality*; *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography*; and *Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer*. The translator of Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Tally is the editor of *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*; *Kurt Vonnegut: Critical Insights*; and *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*.

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Literature's Sensuous Geographies: Postcolonial Matters of Place

By Sten Pultz Moslund

For Martha

we are, from the start, interrupted by alterity and not fully recoverable to ourselves.

Judith Butler ("Giving an Account of Oneself")

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has occasioned an explosion of innovative, multidisciplinary scholarship. Spatially oriented literary studies, whether operating under the banner of literary geography, literary cartography, geophilosophy, geopoetics, geocriticism, or the spatial humanities more generally, have helped to reframe or transform contemporary criticism by focusing attention, in various ways, on the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature. Reflecting upon the representation of space and place, whether in the real world, in imaginary universes, or in those hybrid zones where fiction meets reality, scholars and critics working in spatial literary studies are helping to reorient literary criticism, history, and theory. *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* is a book series presenting new research in this burgeoning field of inquiry.

In exploring such matters as the representation of place in literary works, the relations between literature and geography, the historical transformation of literary and cartographic practices, and the role of space in critical theory, among many others, geocriticism and spatial literary studies have also developed interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary methods and practices, frequently making productive connections to architecture, art history, geography, history, philosophy, politics, social theory, and urban studies, to name but a few. Spatial criticism is not limited to the spaces of the so-called real world, and it sometimes calls into question any too facile distinction between real and imaginary places, as it frequently investigates what Edward Soja has referred to as the "real-and-imagined" places we experience in literature as in life. Indeed, although a great deal of important research has been devoted to the literary representation of certain identifiable and well-known places (e.g., Dickens's London, Baudelaire's Paris, or Joyce's Dublin), spatial critics have also explored the otherworldly spaces of literature, such as those to be found in myth, fantasy, science fiction, video games, and cyberspace. Similarly, such criticism is interested in the relationship between spatiality and such different media or genres as film or television, music, comics, computer programs, and

other forms that may supplement, compete with, and potentially problematize literary representation. Titles in the *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* series include both monographs and collections of essays devoted to literary criticism, theory, and history, often in association with other arts and sciences. Drawing on diverse critical and theoretical traditions, books in the series reveal, analyze, and explore the significance of space, place, and mapping in literature and in the world.

The concepts, practices, or theories implied by the title of this series are to be understood expansively. Although geocriticism and spatial literary studies represent a relatively new area of critical and scholarly investigation, the historical roots of spatial criticism extend well beyond the recent past, informing present and future work. Thanks to a growing critical awareness of spatiality, innovative research into the literary geography of real and imaginary places has helped to shape historical and cultural studies in ancient, medieval, early modern, and modernist literature, while a discourse of spatiality undergirds much of what is still understood as the postmodern condition. The suppression of distance by modern technology, transportation, and telecommunications has only enhanced the sense of place, and of displacement, in the age of globalization. Spatial criticism examines literary representations not only of places themselves, but also of the experience of place and displacement, while exploring the interrelations between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it. In sum, the work being done in geocriticism and spatial literary studies, broadly conceived, is diverse and far reaching. Each volume in this series takes seriously the mutually impressive effects of space or place and artistic representation, particularly as these effects manifest themselves in works of literature. By bringing the spatial and geographical concerns to bear on their scholarship, books in the *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* series seek to make possible different ways of seeing literary and cultural texts, to pose novel questions for criticism and theory, and to offer alternative approaches to literary and cultural studies. In short, the series aims to open up new spaces for critical inquiry.

Robert T. Tally Jr.

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CONTENTS

Series Editor's Preface	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
Part I Theories	
1 The Tenor of Place, Language, and Body in Postcolonial Studies	17
2 Sensuous Empires and Silent Calls of the Earth	31
3 Postcolonial Aesthetics and the Politics of the Sensible	45
4 How to Read Place in Literature with the Body: Language as Poiesis-Aisthesis	59
Part II Analyses	
5 Mind, Eye, Body, and Place in J. M. Coetzee's <i>Dusklands</i> (1974)	81
6 Silent Geographies in Joseph Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (1902)	97
7 Nation and Embodied Experiences of the Place World in Chinua Achebe's <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (1958)	115
8 Karen Blixen's <i>Out of Africa</i> (1937): Colonial Aesthetic and Decolonial Aisthesis	135
9 The Settler's Language and Emplacement in Patrick White's <i>Voss</i> (1957)	153

10	Place, Language, and Body in the Caribbean Experience and the Example of Harold Sonny Ladoo's <i>No Pain Like This Body</i> (1972)	179
11	Place and Sensuous Geographies in Migration Literature	203
12	Spatial Transgressions and Migrant Aesthetics in David Dabydeen's <i>Disappearance</i> (1993)	219
	Coda	241
	Notes	247
	Bibliography	253
	Index	265

INTRODUCTION

Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence.

Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*)

In 1884–85, a conference was held in Berlin where men, bent over two-dimensional maps of the world, divided Africa—a phenomenal reality of sun, earth, things, animals, places, people, smells, and sounds—into huge geometrical spaces with long, straight borders symbolizing different European ownerships. A huge part of the planet and everything in it was being cut up into abstract territories to be controlled like objects by the Idea of imperialism.

Two years before the conference, in 1882, and not so far from Berlin, Friedrich Nietzsche had launched a decisive assault on Western metaphysics when in *The Gay Science* he let a madman announce that God had been killed by mankind. The death of God was good news in Nietzsche's philosophy—"There has never been a greater deed" (Nietzsche, 1882/1887, section 125). It spelt the downfall of the metaphysics of religion that, with its renunciation of earthly life, had disengaged humans from the vitality of the world they actually live in. Yet, Nietzsche's madman remained deeply distraught, for man had made himself a god instead of God. Humans had become self-creators by replacing the metaphysical value of religion with other metaphysical values. The *theo*-logic was replaced by the *ego*-logic of modernity, and modern man's secular values proved no less damaging to human relations with the tangible world: "How were we able to drink up the sea?" the madman exclaimed, "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from the sun?" (Nietzsche, 1882/1887, section 125). Any immediate relation to phenomenal reality had vanished: "Do you not feel the breath of *empty space*?" the madman pleaded with the people in the

marketplace—the significant setting in which he delivered his message (Nietzsche, 1882/1887, section 125, emphasis added).

In Heidegger's construal of this famous moment in world philosophy, the "metaphysical world" reads as "the realm of Ideas and Ideals" (Heidegger, 1943, 61), as exemplified by the imperialist mapping at the Berlin conference. Accordingly, to Heidegger, Nietzsche's madman describes how Ideas and Ideals have come to determine "*the sensory world*" or "*the physical* in the broader sense"—the earth, the sea, the sun (Heidegger, 1943, 61, emphases added). As modern man has "risen up into the I-ness of the *ego cogito*," "all that *is*, is transformed into object" (Heidegger, 1943, 108, emphasis added): things in themselves—the earth, the sea, the sun—are replaced by abstract ideas superimposed on the thing world to submit it to the mastery of modern man. Rather than the phenomenal world itself, modern man comes to relate only to convenient or self-serving ideas and objectifications of phenomena—as, for instance, the way the world comes to be perceived as a world of exploitable resources. In consequence, modernity has made us oblivious to all that is outside our reduction of everything to egocentric designs and demands on the world. The earth has disappeared, "the earth as the abode of man" (Heidegger, 1943, 107). The earth, the sea, the sun no longer stand forth as the earth, the sea, the sun. They only appear in the metaphysics of modernity as objects of use within the economy of man's ego-logical objectives.

Heidegger further explains that in striking down "that which *is* in itself"—the earth, the sea, the sun—the subject of modernity, "the I-ness of the *ego cogito*," "does away utterly with Being," or generates a "*forgetting of Being*" (Heidegger, 1943, 109). In striking down "that which *is* in itself," our lives are removed from the life of earth, from life as it is in itself. A simple illustration of this is the way life lived right now, sensed and affirmed *right here* by the *presence* of the earth, the sea, the sun, is suspended by the suprasensory values inherent in the utilitarian Idea of progress (the internal logic of imperialism and the capitalist market). The Idea of progress will always direct the attention of our lives (our attention to life itself) away to something else, outside the present time and place, to the promise of something different, something better, something more to come later, always to come later.

Quoting Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche may strike some readers as a rather uncommon opening for a book on postcolonial literature and theory (even if crossed with a perspective on literature—place—that is not exclusive to postcolonial studies). As it is, Heidegger

is foundational to most of the phenomenological theories of place (and aesthetics) that this brief study (or, rather, experiment) relies on. Just as importantly, though, and for everything that Heidegger may not have in common with postcolonial concerns, he (along with Nietzsche) is one of the most important precursors to something that has always been a pivotal matter in postcolonial literature and theory: *the deconstruction of western metaphysics*. For this reason, Heidegger's emphasis on modernity's forgetting of Being, the metaphysics of the I-ness of the ego cogito, the suprasensory "realm of Ideas and Ideals" as determining "the sensory world," will resonate across the study of this book's central concern: questions of *place, body, and language* in contexts where the *metaphysics of western modernity* has shown its darkest sides.

The "darkest sides" of Western modernity is a paraphrase of Walter Mignolo (2011a). To Mignolo, the darkest side of Western modernity—"the dispensability of human life to increase economic gains" (2012, n.p.)—stands out most clearly in the history of the Western "discovery" and subjugation of other lands and peoples. The systems of colonization, slavery, and indentured labor and the exploitation of natural resources on a massive, global scale may all be seen in terms of a stunning exercise in the regulation of all aspects of life and human existence—a *biopolitics*, in essence.

Mignolo speaks of the manifestation of modernity as a biopolitics in terms of a "mercantilization of life" by which "the politics of life itself extends to the market" (Mignolo, 2011a, 144). Before this (and very much in line with the implications in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche), Giorgio Agamben (building on Foucault) has defined biopolitics as a "politicization of life" (120), as "the growing inclusion of man's natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power" (Agamben, 1995, 119, e.g., see also Foucault, 1978–79). This, to Agamben, has reached an extreme in "the political space of modernity," where "life is more and more clearly placed at the center of State politics" and law "seeks to transform itself entirely into life" (Agamben, 1995, 111, 185, 123). We are no longer born as *humans*, he observes as an example, but as *citizens* (Agamben, 1995, 128)—or noncitizens, it might be added, not forgetting all of those who are not recognized or only partially recognized as belonging to any state.

Agamben famously describes the concentration camp as the absolute manifestation of modernity's biopolitics. The camp forms a space of total domination in which "natural life is wholly included in the *polis*"—the ultimate "politicization of life" (Agamben, 1995, 131, 120). However, as Mignolo rightly points out, Agamben forgets

how the camp builds on technologies of the management of human bodies—and life itself—that had already been enacted in the colonies (Mignolo, 2011a, 139–40). Do you not feel “the breath of *empty space*” in Joseph Conrad’s depiction of a group of African slaves collapsed on the ground in Belgian Congo: “One, with his chin propped on his knees, *stared at nothing*, in an intolerable and appalling manner”? (Conrad, 1902, 25, emphasis added)—or in the hollow men at the colonial station, indifferent to the suffering they cause (and manage), like the Company’s chief accountant, penholder behind his ear, who keeps up the appearance of control with his starched collar, snowy trousers, and parted, oiled hair and is concerned only with “correct entries,” or how about the station manager who “originated nothing,” but is never ill and can “keep the routine going” (Conrad, 1902, 25–32)? With these men, life itself is turned into a function within an Idea only.

To Mignolo, the massive European management of life and human bodies preceding the Nazi concentration camps “illuminates the fact that the colonies were not a secondary and marginal event in the history of Europe, but that, on the contrary, the colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe” (Mignolo, 2011a, 139–40). For the same reason, Mignolo argues—as does a postcolonial scholar like Bill Ashcroft—that Western modernity and imperialism are two sides of the same coin. Imperialism was produced by the governing Idea of modernity just as much as modernity was produced by the inner logic of imperialism (2012, n.p.; Ashcroft, 1998, 13). Mignolo uses the term “coloniality” to describe the inner logic of modernity as one that is essentially based on subjugating all of reality to a conquering will—like the I-ness of the ego cogito Heidegger describes, which does away with “that which *is* in itself” and transforms everything, including human lives, into disposable *objects*. Coloniality, to Mignolo, is not only the darker side of modernity, “but its very *raison d’être*” (Mignolo, 1992, 456). Or, as Ashcroft puts it, arguing the same point:

“The threshold of “The Modern World” is the confluence of the three great world systems—imperialism, capitalism, and the Enlightenment. Modernity is fundamentally about conquest, “the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of the soul, and the creation of truth.”

(Ashcroft, 1998, 14, quoting Bryan Turner)

Mignolo consistently maintains the conjunction “modernity/coloniality” to draw attention to the inseparable connection between Western modernity and imperialism. I shall do the same in this study

whenever I refer to the dark side of modernity or the inner logic of modernity as the ego-logic of utilitarianism, development, and progress, or its biopolitical regulation and mercantilization of life and nature. Yet, it might be important to note that I refrain from a wholesale rejection of modernity (which will come across in some of the literary analyses to follow). In so far as modernity may also be said to encompass the complexities of a heightened human self-reflection,¹ a coming into self-consciousness that engenders an erosion of univocal productions of meaning and “naturally given” truths or a permanent interrogation of the self and human knowledge of the world (e.g., see Foucault, 1984, 310–13; Dussel, 2000; Ashcroft, 1998), then modernity has indeed helped the critical orientation of the present study along. Like Ashcroft, the criticism of modernity inherent in the theoretical perspectives in this book does not envision an “overcoming of modernity” as such, but “modernity coming to understand its own contradictions and uncertainties” (Ashcroft, 1998, 15), modernity becoming conscious of its dark side, of its effects of dehumanization and enslavement amid its programs of liberation.

Like many other scholars in postcolonial and decolonial studies, Mignolo very often distances himself from Western thinkers. Yet, he also acknowledges that in challenging the darker sides of Western modernity, we may still appropriate “great European thinkers” and what they did without becoming everything they thought—we can follow Nietzsche and Heidegger, for instance, “as a model of what to do, and not what to think” (Mignolo, 2011a, 108).¹ I could not agree more—and, to expand on this thought, I see an epistemological earthquake like the one sketched earlier (Nietzsche’s madman), not as an earthquake in European philosophy or history of thought (thought does not stop at political or cultural borders—or should not be allowed to be stopped). Nietzsche’s epistemological earthquake is a moment in *world philosophy*, in the world’s history of thought that is still reverberating to this day as a continual challenge to the darker side of modernity. In 2011 Mignolo made an analysis of the life-negating values of the metaphysics of Western modernity that was similar to (almost identical with) Heidegger’s construal of Nietzsche’s madman—this time round connected specifically to imperial history (which Nietzsche and Heidegger failed to address):

in the sphere of epistemology, coloniality had its foundation in theology, that is, in the theo-politics of knowledge. Secularism displaced God as the guarantor of knowledge, placing Man and Reason in God’s stead, and centralized the Ego. Ego-politics (the overarching cosmology on which bio-politics was founded) then displaced theo-politics (whose concern was the control of the