

# POSTCOLONIAL 'TEXTUAL SPACE': TOWARDS AN APPROACH

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Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.  
Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

The unceasing flow of conference announcements that many academics receive nowadays is one of the best indicators of critical trends in the humanities. Whatever scholarly approach a particular seminar, department, or journal considers imminent or extinct, for the researcher regularly sent the details of upcoming colloquia, there is the comfort, or discomfort, of having more substantial proof at hand regarding shifts in thinking. This usefulness derives not only from the enormous number of announcements reaching the academic from a myriad locations, but from the fact that in the main they consist of easily identifiable, institutionally developed assertions concerning the nature of this or that body of knowledge. Containing the bare bones of new and old research directions, they are a discourse-analyst's dream: perhaps nowhere else can one find such a density of 'statements', in Foucault's sense of the word.

With this in mind, the 'Textual Space' conference announcement that prompted this, and many other papers, is a resource not to be overlooked. To reiterate the core of the proposal:

'Textual Space' will seek to investigate 'space' as a new category of analysis in African, Asian and Near and Middle Eastern literatures. Until recently, postcolonial discourse has considered space in abstract theoretical terms. As opposed to more theorising about centre and periphery, this conference would like to address spaces within literary texts.

Despite its brevity, this assertion concerning past critical practice - and an alternative to it - can tell us much if we are prepared to consider its fundamental dynamics. These dynamics involve the polarities of, on the one hand, 'abstract' and 'concrete', and on the other, 'text' and 'context'.

First of all, the announcement argues that the rejuvenation of space as a critical concept begins with a movement away from thinking space in 'abstract theoretical terms' such as 'centre and periphery', and by implication a range of associated dyads (metropolitan centre and postcolony, the West and the non-West, etc.). This is the initial dynamic: against 'abstract theoretical terms', concrete non-theoretical terms. Second of all, the announcement argues that this consideration of space in concrete, non-theoretical terms is accomplished by approaching the spaces *within* literary texts - that is, moving away from spaces *outside* literary texts (i.e. 'context'). This is the subsequent dynamic: against exteriority (context), interiority (text).

Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of how accurate a portrayal of postcolonial critical activity this is, or what might be gained from concentrating on the 'literary text' in the way suggested, let us dwell on two fundamental aspects of this critical theatre, so quickly established. Firstly, there is the simple fact that space is conceived of as functioning *within* the framework of abstract/concrete and text/context. These four positions are in a sense beyond space; space is developed as a research category by shifts between them. In short, these positions compose the subtending conceptual matrix on which any understanding of space depends: not only do they cover all the ground, but in an important sense they *are* the ground.

Secondly, and less obviously, the announcement is ambivalent regarding what is or is not 'abstract'. If we take 'abstract' to mean not tangible or concrete, what are we to make of the example 'centre and periphery', which is conventionally (if not only) a geographical term? What kind of abstracted reality, or real abstraction, is being indicated here? And if addressing spaces within literary texts is a way of escaping abstraction - a way of grasping the concrete, and moving out of the theoretical - then isn't this movement into the text in an important sense profoundly removed from the 'concrete'?

How to react to the above brief analysis? Of course one can simply ignore it, arguing that what is of real importance is neither the framework being relied upon, nor a certain instability of terminology, but simply the fact that the announcement efficiently opens up the question of *reduction*. Until recently, space has been reduced to such grand conceptual schemas as 'centre and periphery', and this does an injustice to the complexity of the spaces postcolonial texts describe. This is undoubtedly true, and in this regard the value of the announcement's gesture should in no way be underestimated: it calls for readings able to make subtler spatial distinctions than heretofore. But what is equally true is that pursuing the question of spatial complexity within texts in the way that the announcement outlines does not raise what seem to be two very important questions: are the abstract/concrete text/context dyads in fact *sufficient* for a discussion of space, and what is the origin of the ambivalence pervading their use?

*'Social' and 'Real' Space*

We can begin by asking after postcolonial theory's understanding of space, 'textual' or otherwise. One way of answering is to say that postcolonial theory by and large ignores the complex *production* of space in favour of a neat divide between 'real space' and 'social space'. Whilst critics such as Henri Lefebvre have long argued that space cannot be thought of as 'the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action [...] an object distinct from the point of view of "subjects"' (1991: 410) (or texts, we might add), postcolonial theory still tends to grasp space either as a basic principle of existence or as a way of discussing social form. But as Edward Soja points out

Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing 'in' space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction, ideology, and representation, there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension. (1996: 46).

Likewise, space derives from social practice; there is no 'unsocialized space'. Space does not rest pacifically beyond the projections that constitute a habitus, but is in fact a consequence of those projections. Thus, while 'the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space which are inseparably linked to its physical production', the production of meaning (or discourse) also implies the production of space (Smith 1984: 77).

I have stated that postcolonial theory has by and large failed to appreciate this approach to space; one efficient way of demonstrating this is to examine the arguments of two leading postcolonial theorists, Homi

Bhabha and Edward Said. Whilst these two critics are often (1991: 410) - in fact repetitively - referenced by postcolonial researchers, it is precisely because of that profile that it is worthwhile discussing them in this instance, since the field's general grasp of space can be more or less effectively indicated. The discussions of Bhabha and Said are followed by a shorter discussion of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) as a way of indicating a common 'variation on the theme', before turning to the question of alternative reading practices.

Bhabha and Said's very different approaches to space reflect the more general division between 'social' and 'real' space that pervades postcolonial theory. On the one hand, space is understood as identical with the shifting social world of ideas and identity (Bhabha); on the other hand, space is contemplated as a pure materiality that analysis cannot penetrate, thus providing a dependable referentiality beyond discourse (Said). In either case, space as the *interdependency* of ideation and materiality is not fully conceptualized: space remains brainwaves or bricks. Following Henri Lefebvre, we can think of these approaches to space as the *illusion of transparency* and the *realistic illusion* (Lefebvre 1991: 27-30; Soja 1996: 63). The illusion of transparency conjures worldly space

entirely as mental space, an 'encrypted reality' that is decipherable in thoughts and utterances, speech and writing, in literature and language, in discourses and texts, in logical and epistemological ideation (ibid.)

The realistic illusion, on the other hand, 'oversubstantiates the world in a naturalistic or mechanistic imperialism or empiricism, in which objective

“things” have more reality than “thoughts” (ibid.). Because of this, representation either accords with reality or defaults on it through misrepresentation; at any rate, space is ‘objectively and concretely there to be fully measured and accurately described’ (ibid.: 64).

*Bhabha and the Illusion of Transparency*

Homi Bhabha’s critique of colonial discourse is very well known. Showing colonial representation to be dependent on, and able to reveal, a fundamental ambivalence concerning the identity-construction of the representer, his work emphasizes ‘the complexity of psychic projections in the pathological colonial relation’ (Bhabha 1986: xx). The intention here is not to argue for or against this grasp of the play of colonial authority, or indeed to engage in criticism of the specific arguments that Bhabha raises concerning colonial identity and identification. Critics from Robert Young to Benita Parry have done this with great effectiveness, questioning Bhabha’s lack of reflexivity concerning the European provenance of psychoanalysis, his radical generalization of colonial interaction, and the suitability of his appropriation of a Derridean vocabulary to describe processes that are not linguistic. Instead, my intention is simply to outline the operation of the term ‘space’ in his work and comment on the understanding that usage implies.

First of all, we should note that Bhabha makes a specific claim regarding what his own critical project accomplishes in relation to space. In *The Location of Culture* he announces that via a postcolonial archaeology he has derived modernity’s ‘spatial time’ and its ‘spatial boundaries’ (Bhabha 1994: 254). What does he mean by this? Nothing less than the fact that he has inaugurated a way of reflecting on the ‘assumed hierarchy forms of

rationality and universality' that are a feature of the 'white world' (ibid.: 237). However it soon becomes apparent that for Bhabha space is a way of talking about time: the 'assumed hierarchical forms' are temporal rather than spatial. Modernity's 'spatial boundaries' are in fact the limits and limitations of a temporally static conception of identity, characteristic of modernity, rather than any geography and its mode of production. This much is clear (once one starts looking) from the quote, taken from Fanon, that opens *The Location of Culture*: "The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time"(xiv).

The location within *The Location of Culture* which best reveals how this standpoint creates a certain 'transparent' understanding of space is Bhabha's discussion of the work of Frederic Jameson, which he wishes to characterize as a Marxism unable to take into account the complexity of modernity's significations:

The radical discontinuity that exists between bourgeois private life and the 'unimaginable' decentering of global capital does not find its scheme of representation in the spatial position or the representational visibility of the free-standing, disjoined sentences, to which Jameson insistently draws our attention. What must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference (op. cit.: 216-217).

From a spatial point of view what we have here is the complicated transmutation of the space of modernity from the possibility of it being in any way socio-geographical (that is, concerning 'the spatial position') to it being a wholly conceptual space, one that can only be truly mapped in relation to the temporal discontinuities which mark out 'historical

realities'. It is truly ironic that Bhabha, intent on critiquing Marxist dialectics, affirms a commitment to temporality which has much in common with a Marxism long transcended by more astute Marxian critics (Frederic Jameson being one of them) *precisely because those critics have taken space into account*. Henri Lefebvre puts this re-evaluation of Marxism as follows:

The dialectic today no longer clings to historicity and historical time, or to a temporal mechanism such as 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' [...] This, then, is what is new and paradoxical: the dialectic is no longer attached to temporality. Therefore, refutations of the historical materialism or of hegelian historicity cannot function as critiques of the dialectic. To recognise space, to recognise what 'takes place' there is to resume the dialectic [...] (1976: 14, 17).

In short, it is Bhabha who moves space off the agenda by privileging time in a way which Marxian critics have learnt to avoid; apart from Jameson's writings, David Harvey's geographical theorizing is a case in point. For these critics, social production cannot be understood only in terms of temporality. Again, the irony is considerable when one appreciates that a common criticism of Bhabha is his lack of attention to historical differences in the exercise of colonialism: it is in fact through a temporal fixation that Bhabha elides those differences, which are actually as *geographical* as they are historical.

The dematerialization of space which Bhabha accomplishes - the way in which it gains an ideational transparency - is also clear in his advertisement of what 'third space' is. He writes, 'hybridity to me is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories which constitute it, and sets up new structures of

authority [...]’ (1990: 211). It is obvious that what Bhabha in his embattled way is trying to promote has little to do with space in any sense beyond its metaphorical operation. Again, but this time in opposition to the ‘spatial boundaries’ of modernity, Bhabha is really considering *social identity*: ‘third space’ is that conceptual operation by which identity is that which can recognize its own difference to itself, rather than that which can only recognize difference between selves. This is an admirable point, but it should be appreciated how as a result of using space as the determining term, space as location dissolves. Edward Soja, in his short discussion of Bhabha, is too forgiving when he writes that the

Third Space of Homi Bhabha is occasionally teasingly on the edge of being a spatially ungrounded literary trope, a floating metaphor for a critical *historical* consciousness that inadvertently masks a continued privileging of temporality over spatiality (1996: 141-2, original emphasis).

It could be argued that since Bhabha’s use of ‘space’ is purely metaphorical, to impute a spatial reductionism to him is mistaken. In other words, whilst it may be an ill-chosen term, since it is not in fact space he is really referring to there is no intrinsic problem. However, Bhabha also wants to claim that he is talking about space in a more worldly sense; as a result there is a ‘disturbing slippage between actual and abstract spaces, especially in relation to colonialism, which is an experiential social landscape of violence and repression’ (Phillips 1998). This much is clear in his claim to have ‘attempted to constitute a postcolonial, critical discourse that contests modernity through the establishment of other historical sites, other forms of enunciation’ (1994: 254). For Bhabha a ‘historical site’ is social reality itself; on the other hand, it is nothing less

and nothing more than ‘a form of enunciation’. Or consider the following passage:

These in-between spaces [that is, between traditional identities] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood \_ singular or communal \_ that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (1994: 2).

Here, just as Soja describes, daily life is wholly decipherable in terms of ‘epistemological ideation’ (1996: 63). In trying to establish a connection between the space of thinking and the quotidian, Bhabha cannot help establishing the quotidian as nothing more than the abstract ‘terrain’ of thought.

### *Said and the Realist Illusion*

If Bhabha’s epigraph suggests that ‘[e]very human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time’, Edward Said assures us to the contrary that to address those problems we need to understand that ‘human history is rooted in the earth’ (1993: 5). This amounts to an eerily accurate reversal of the illusion of transparency: if space for Bhabha is engineered as time and identity, space for Said is radically concretized as earth. I use the word ‘concretized’ here reflexively; as we shall see, Said is particularly fond of the substantiality it implies.

Given the short quote above, it would seem that Said might very well understand space as ‘a kind of philosophical palimpsest for descriptions of politics, epistemology, and subjectivity [...] a solid referent outside language to which the intended line of argument can refer for stability, credibility, substantiality’ (Kirby 1996: 1). Whilst I think that this is

essentially correct, his deliberations on geography and narrative have to be examined to see whether or not a real case can be made. The very fact that his project is formulated to insist on the importance of representation in the face of claims concerning the priority of a historical materialist outlook should be warning enough not to characterize his stance in a perfunctory manner.

There are several passages in which Said appears fully cognisant of space's relation to representation. For example, he writes that imperialism cannot be properly thought 'without important philosophical and imaginative processes at work in the production as well as the acquisition, subordination, and settlement of space' (1989: 217). Likewise, in an exchange with W.J.T. Mitchell, he connects space to narrative in a way which would not look out of place in the writings of Michel de Certeau:

W.J.T.M: So narrative for you is actually a kind of spatial notion.  
E.W.S. Absolutely. Not a temporal one. I mean, obviously, it has temporal elements - it would be silly not to acknowledge that. But it's principally, for me, the possibility of producing a territorial object, if you like, or a territorial location, as in Robinson Crusoe, where, in talking, he revisits, he repopulates, he re-enacts both the shipwreck and the establishing of himself on the island. That's the core of it (1998: 50).

Again, concentrating on these passages alone might lead one to conclude that Said is not in fact operating with a concept of space which is ultimately material in nature. But what, then, are we to make of passages such as the following?

At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others (Said 1993: 5).

Is there a contradiction, and if so what form does it take? To answer these questions we should turn to Said's remarks on imaginative geographies in *Orientalism* (1978), as well as his long essay, 'Narrative, Geography and Interpretation' (1990), the very title of which would seem to suggest a consideration of the interrelationship of space and representation.

The closest Said comes to theorizing space in *Orientalism* is in the first chapter, 'The Scope of Orientalism'. Here, Said is intent on suggesting that 'there is something *more* than what appears to be merely positive knowledge', and that 'something *more*' is 'imaginative and historical knowledge' (1978: 55). What should be noted is that although Said is speculating on the nature of that imaginative and historical knowledge, he is also confirming 'positive knowledge' in its empirical separateness: in spatial terms this means a contrast between 'objective space' and 'imaginative geography', the latter implying the former (ibid.). Following Gaston Bachelard, Said writes:

The objective space of a house - its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms - is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value [...]. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here (ibid.).

Said thus understands space both objectively and imaginatively; the *production* of a particular space by a narrative - suggested in his conversation with Mitchell - takes place in relation to a geography *already definable* in its own objective terms - and these terms are available to the

critic. What narrative actually does is overlay that primary, non-social space ('earth') with its own spectral topos.

This division, and the understanding that the critic is in a position which allows the comprehension of 'real' space, is made very clear in Said's essay 'Narrative, Geography and Interpretation'. Far from dwelling on the nature of geography's relationship to narrative, Said uses a positivistic conception of geography to make a series of points concerning the importance of paying attention to a text's geographical provenance. Opening with a salutation to Raymond Williams and his oeuvre, Said notes that Williams conceives of culture as 'a remarkably varied set of structures deriving from the land', and that his conception of Britain 'is in a quite radical sense a geographical one, geography understood here as the science of the earth, its physical, political, historical, social and ideological features [...]'(1990: 83). He follows this by stating that because of Williams's work 'we can now retrospectively begin to discern all around his Britain, those other nations of the world without which any true geography of the historical adventure of mankind would be incomplete' (ibid.). Leaving aside the oddity of such a formulation as 'the historical adventure of mankind', it is clear that Said is not interested in questioning Williams's positivistic spatial formularies, but merely extending them. Attempting to find 'something as comparable to and as certain as England's geography' in post-war world culture is his task; he wishes to ask 'how, in their own way, do these other [cultural] formations depend on no less *concrete* a geography than does, say, *The Country and the City*?' (ibid.: 84, my emphasis). By the end of the essay this dependency has been argued for in a particular case: contra several well-known readings, Camus' works have been re-situated in their '*actual* geographical

nexus' (ibid.: 97, my emphasis). As such, Camus' narratives might themselves produce an imaginative geography (following Said's reply to Mitchell), but at the same time they belong to a physical 'nexus' not subject to the 'imagination'. What underlies this point of view is in fact a very old assumption indeed, that specific places reside within a much larger spatial totality. As Michael Curry indicates: 'It is commonly thought that the creation of a place is a matter of carving a niche out of some pre-existent larger space [...]' (1996: 8). However, as Curry goes on to point out, in fact

this is not at all what happens; indeed, the issue of space arises most commonly when appeal is made to a particular notion of space as a unifying image, a means of putting together an otherwise disparate set of phenomena (ibid.).

For Said, 'Geography' is that unifying spatial image, one which allows him to think in global terms concerning cultural difference. Geography is that which subtends 'the historical adventure of mankind', a phrase which appears a little less strange now that we have unearthed the conception of space it is predicated on. In an irony which equals Bhabha's dismissal of Marxian thought (while replaying its classic temporal privileging), Said 'fixes' space whilst supposedly showing the importance of representation to its possibility. Space is advertised as having an intrinsic link to representational activity whilst in fact remaining strategically telluric. But as Henri Lefebvre and many others have pointed out, *all* space has a representational character - even the most straightforwardly geographic - which drastically undermines Said's 'frequent appeals to an old-fashioned existential realism' (Clifford 1988: 259). Just as Said's suggestion that 'a

text or tradition distorts, dominates or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient' (ibid.: 260) raises the difficult question of what that authenticity amounts to, who recognizes it and from where, so too does his conception of a basic geography raise the question of what that geography amounts to, who recognizes it and from where.

*A Variation on the Theme*

We have come a considerable distance towards understanding how space is deployed in postcolonial theory: typically, space is isolated in one of two 'holding patterns', the illusion of transparency and the realist illusion. The study of colonial and postcolonial literature has for the most part repeated this bipolar disorder, sometimes restlessly deploying both options as a way of trying to counter the restrictions that attend each. This is nowhere more apparent than in Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), the first major critique of imperial travel writing and certainly the most widely known. One way of exposing this double deployment is to examine the term 'contact zone' which she introduces as part of her theoretical model in her introductory chapter, 'Criticism in the contact zone'. Pratt aims to foreground

the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees', not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices [...] (1992: 7).

But a “‘contact’ perspective’, as described by Pratt, requires grasping that colonial relations are formed in the ‘contact zone’, of which she gives two descriptions:

social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination [...] (4).

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict [...] (6).

Examining these two passages carefully, we can detect an ambivalence regarding space which systematically replays both Bhabha and Said’s determinations of the concept. On the one hand space is non-geographical, on the other hand it is physical space, the container-space of materiality, “the space *in* which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact...”(ibid. my emphasis). We should recognise this ambivalence for what it is: not merely a careless blurring of definitions, but evidence of a genuine philosophical instability. We can trace this instability throughout her study. Having no theory of produced space, space is dematerialised as identity-determined social space (Bhabha), or materialised as a background (Said). *Imperial Eyes* uses ‘space’ to refer either to the operation of identity during encounters between the coloniser and the colonised, or to an “actual geographical nexus”. Her various uses of the term ‘contact zone’ make this divide explicit:

...identity in the contact zone resides in their sense of personal independence, property, and social authority, rather than in scientific erudition, survival or adventurism.(159)

Another branch of the civilizing mission, social reformism might be said to constitute a form of female imperial intervention in the contact zone.(160)

Elsewhere, however, the contact zone is straightforwardly geographical:

They [the Afrikaners] were also troubled by another phenomenon of the contact zone, so-called “mixed bands” of Khoikhoi, !Kung, escaped slaves, Euroafricans, and the occasional renegade white person.(16)

[Kolb’s description] is a telling one, for it locates “the Europeans” in the same frame as “the Hottentots,” in the kind of everyday interaction that goes on all the time in contact zones.(43)

The operation of the illusion of transparency and the realist illusion within the *same* argument shows that they do not necessarily confront each other. As Lefebvre notes in a crucial aside, “The shifting back and forward between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation”(1991: 30). What effect does this “flickering”, revealed by Pratt’s various deployments of the term ‘contact zone’, have on an understanding of imperial travel literature and space? Without exaggeration, it defers the entire question of the production of space and the relation of that production to representation. Travel literature in this formulation can only be the mental space of identity *or* the ideological expression of extra-textual spatial processes: this is why Pratt can write, “How do such signifying practices [those of travel literature] encode and

legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them?" (5) The description of space cannot in itself be understood as intrinsically related to physical acts of colonisation; instead, it is merely the encrypted *reflection* of those acts.

*Reading Practices: Against Decoding*

No doubt I have so far given the impression that very little has been done in postcolonial circles regarding space, and that what has been done has somehow mistaken its object. But of course this is not the case – what I have described is a tendency, and one which has been weakening considerably over the last decade. In terms of postcolonial writing that has approached space with the circumspection it deserves, John Noyes's monograph on colonial German literature in South West Africa, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (1992), deserves mention, as does Paul Carter's much better known (but widely misunderstood) *The Road to Botany Bay: An exploration of landscape and history* (1989). However, both these works are deeply indebted to the "spatial turn" of the last three decades, and it is to the writings of the several theorists associated with that turn that we need to turn in order to think through what it might mean to read 'textual space' without resorting to the critical options already discussed (Cosgrove 2000:7).

As my initial comments on real versus social space implied, there is no secure location called 'contextual' space to discover beneath 'textual' space. The decoding of postcolonial literary space in terms of an independent spatial context is a doomed task, since space itself is primordially an effect of representation, and thus paradoxically the

product of what we are hoping will reveal it. What this means, above all, is that we can no longer be comfortable with 'literal' versus 'figurative' spatial meanings. Conventionally, both terms are premised on a referential hope: in the case of literal meaning, a reference to real, contextual spaces; in the case of figurative meaning, a literal meaning which stands 'behind' figurality, and which once again refers to contextual spaces. What, the student learns to ask, does the castle stand for? What does the island stand for? Yet as we have seen, if the anterior literalism which anchors this interpretative method is in fact itself a function of signification, existentially indebted to the descriptions which are attempting to describe it, the possibility of any fundamental literal meaning is sabotaged.

A reading strategy that questions the function of the literal can be placed in a somewhat wider theoretical context. In 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', Jacques Derrida proposes an analysis of literature that includes a "*becoming-literary of the literal*" (1978: 230): that is, the development of a properly critical conception of the literal. Although Derrida is discussing this as a possibility for Freudian literary analysis, his comments apply equally to the study of postcolonial literary space: "Until now, only the analysis of literary *signifieds*, that is non-literary signified meanings, has been undertaken. But such questions [concerning the nature of non-literary signified meanings, i.e. literal meanings] refer to the entire history of the literary forms themselves, and to the history of everything within them which was destined precisely to authorise this disdain of the signifier" (ibid.). What Derrida is pointing to is the critical importance of wrenching the literal out of a system that would have it be the passive designator of an already pre-formed reality - how the dynamic of literal versus figurative meaning is in fact an *internal* literary dynamic. Such a wrenching means

that one can no longer maintain a “transcendental opposition, between presentation and representation” (Rotman 1987:28).

If we cannot depend on the presupposition that there are spaces that postcolonial literature is ‘interpreting’ or ‘representing’, what remains? What remains is the question of projection, and of the interplay between projections: how “language thus confers reality on the possible world as such” (Deleuze 1995: 147) In other words, what remains is reading postcolonial literature’s *performance* of space, a reading made possible by the realisation that “every story is a travel story - a spatial practice” (de Certeau 1988: 115). To insist on the point once more, such a reading does not depend on a literal/figural dynamic: subtending both terms is a figurality irreducible to the literal. This figurality is not one can be decoded in terms of an anterior reality; it exists epidermally, in plain view, and it is this recognition that allows one to determine it as a space-making practice. As Réda Bensmaïa comments in relation to ways of reading Kafka, a critical emphasis on “the surface of its signs” allows one to understand the writing as “an experimental machine, a machine for effects, as in physics” (1986: xi). The critic, in other words, is not in thrall to the text’s depths from which *another* more fundamental spatial meaning must be studiously dredged, since this hermeneutics is dependent on the fiction of conditions supposedly entirely independent of the text. Instead, the critic reads the text “as a chart or a map - a collation of representational devices which depict the *very same* spatial relations which are produced in the act of representation” (Noyes 1991: 287, my emphasis).

To conclude, the movement between ‘contextual space’ and ‘textual space’ that the Textual Space conference announcement proposes only has critical force if those critical distinctions are questioned, and in fact

reformulated. 'Textual space' only becomes a viable critical term if it is understood that representations realise. Texts are not symptoms of space, space itself is a symptom of writing: in short, "language is an instrument of physical, rather than symbolic colonisation" (Carter 1989: 64).

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