

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## Intertextuality and Psychic Space

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Literary geography's extensive history of analyzing literary space has been well documented (Brosseau 2009; 2017; Alexander 2015; Hones 2017). The ambit of literary geography is more expansive and difficult to circumscribe than ever before, owing at least in part to its shift from a predominantly descriptive focus, to one, following Brosseau (1994), investigating the 'space-generating aspects of narrative as a second major stream in geographical literary geography' (Hones 2017: 2). Included within this development has been an understanding of intertextuality as extending beyond text itself; Hones (2011; 2014), for instance, sees the text as a collaborative, spatial event involving a multitude of actors. The purpose of this contribution is to explore Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic explorations of intertextuality both for its limitations, and for its enduring value in thinking about literary space.

Kristeva suggests that intertextuality 'invites the reader to interpret a text as a crossing of texts' (Kristeva 2010: 10), which can take a number of forms. She further describes the 'three dimensions of textual space' (1980: 65) as 'writing subject, addressee, and the exterior texts' (66). She continues: "The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus)' (66; italics in original). In other words, vertical intertextuality refers to how texts take their meaning (by reader or writer) in relation to other texts, while horizontal intertextuality refers to the space between reader and writer. Kristeva's theorization of intertextuality pre-exists any explicit merger of geography and literary studies (Thacker 2005), and as such might seem to lack the spatial or worldly quality necessary to a critical approach to literary geography (as described by Sharp 2000). However, I suggest here that Kristeva's theorization of intertextuality invokes psychic and political registers that remain very useful to a critical understanding of literary space.

Kristeva originally took the term intertextuality from Roland Barthes, her dissertation advisor, who meant it mostly in the framework of literary analysis. For Barthes (1975), the pleasure in reading a text lay in the emotional connection made between it and the reader's everyday experience. All texts could be said to be intertextual, per Barthes, because of the shared social fabric of their consumption. 'Text,' however, should be interpreted broadly here, as Kristeva (1980: 68), following Bakhtin, emphasizes 'the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history.' Kristeva's early intellectual contribution was the transition of these ideas into the psychoanalytic realm, where 'text' refers to any combination of word signifiers put down by authors and consumed by readers. Calbérac (2011) suggests extending this to geographic fieldwork, though Kristeva did not go quite that far). In this she broke with the psychoanalytic work of Lacan, at least to a degree. Lacan famously believed that internal subject formation took shape in relation to its encounters with the external, as, for instance, an infant suckles her mother's breast or a toddler considers his reflection in a mirror. Lacan nevertheless remained skeptical about true intersubjectivity, focusing more on the inevitable parallax (or disconnect) between subject and object. Intersubjectivity would imply that said parallax is ultimately commensurable. For Kristeva, however, intertextuality could be seen as a form of intersubjectivity (Kristeva and Waller 1996) precisely because language is part of how authors and readers, as constantly evolving subjects, speak back to the world of their encounter. This has psychoanalytic value as even fictional texts, such as novels, have the ability to 'lead us as deeply as possible into our own malaises' (Kristeva, in Kristeva and Waller 1996: 195). It also has political value, however, as understanding 'our own malaises' can help resist the commodification of psychic space – more or less what Debord (1984) called the society of the spectacle. She in fact originally intended her psychoanalytic theory of intertextuality as a political strategy, albeit one that refused to privilege the public sphere as the domain of politics (Sjöholm 2005; 2009). In her more recent work she has more directly emphasized the psyche as a site of political struggle (see Kristeva 2002 and 2010 in particular).

Kristeva also posits the intersection of vertical and horizontal intertextuality as a site of those potentialities. For example, in her book *Time and Sense* (1996), Kristeva explores the temporal aesthetic embedded in Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* (published in seven installments between 1913 and 1927). She differentiates the commonly understood notion of time as a linear succession of 'presents' from psychic time, or time that intersects with sensation and experience. Answering her own query 'in which time frame do you live?,' Kristeva (1996: 168) suggests that time as we experience it in our mental lives might range anywhere from the deep historical past, to our own childhoods, to our expectations for the future. The beauty of Proust's fiction, per Kristeva, is that its focus on involuntary memory positions readers to explore their own psychic relation to linear time. This has psychoanalytic value, as it 'maps out a psychic and transpsychic universe that is...a source of communion and sacredness for those who love to read' (170). This is also why Kristeva herself authored several detective novels based around the theme of time, as the reader's investigation of the events leading up to the crime doubles as an investigation of their own malaises, by way of exploring their own psychic time. If vertical intertextuality refers to how

an anterior literary corpus informs how they consume a text, horizontal intertextuality refers to how they engage in this space of communion.

Thus, part of literacy space must involve not just reading but writing, the speaking back to the world of our encounter that can prevent the commodification of desire. In her concept of *intimate revolt*, Kristeva (2002: 11) argues that revolt is not just about action in public space but also a matter of ‘psychical life and its social manifestations (writing, thought, art).’ Perhaps part of the potentiality immanent to literary space is the realization of desire in ways that cannot be enclosed and capitalized upon by material systems of production. The limitations of her model, however, lie in the normative implications of this political strategy. Her attempt to refute Lacan led her to re-affirm the primacy of psychic structures in the shaping of language, and language in the shaping of subjectivity; in other words, ‘in the beginning was the word, but before the beginning there was the unconscious with its repressed content’ (Kristeva 2010: 11). Butler (1989) argues that this theoretical move away from Lacan leads Kristeva to a fundamentally essentializing theory, particularly when it comes to women, precisely because it focuses on psychic drives at the expense of the forms of power that direct those drives in particular ways. Butler (105-6) argues that ‘Kristeva describes the maternal body as bearing a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself.’ What for Kristeva was perhaps a recovery of agency that Lacan had negated, for Butler was the naturalization of maternal instinct that was ultimately conservative. Spivak (1987) likewise takes Kristeva to task for her sweeping generalizations of Chinese women in Kristeva’s book *About Chinese Women* (1977).

Regardless, Kristeva’s work is relevant to literary geography, I would argue, because the validity of any particular theoretical construct is not necessarily internal to it, but rather a matter of how it is extended. Oliver (1993) and Beardsworth (2004), for instance, defend the utility of Kristeva’s theory, at least if it is extended in certain ways, in advancing feminist politics. I may not agree with her insistence on religious practice as a productive way forward for the Left (see Kristeva 2009), but I do think her insightful historical analysis of images of severed heads in *The Severed Head* (2011) can contribute a great deal to our understanding of the contemporary politics of fear. There is no doubt that Kristeva’s psychoanalytic model suffers from an ‘inside-out’ structure that is no longer en vogue in mainstream psychology, let alone most feminist theory (Ahmed 2005), but her extension of intersubjectivity to the text bears some overlap with topological theories often deployed in geography (Blum and Secor 2011; Kneale 2006; Schlosser 2017, for instance). Sharp (2000) argued that a critical literary geography needed to incorporate both humanistic emphases on literary form and materialist emphases on the social position of the text within cultural and ideological circuitries. I have argued here that Kristeva’s theorization of intertextuality fits this criterion, and it does so by refusing to limit political space to the public sphere; the reading and writing mind is by definition a political agent.

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